



# First Year School Evaluation Report Rochester Preparatory Charter School 3

Visit Date: April 26, 2017  
Report Date: February 28, 2018

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## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute’s (the “Institute’s”) observations and findings from its April 26, 2017 first year school evaluation visit to the Rochester Preparatory Charter School 3. The visit team consisted of Jeff Wasbes, Executive Deputy Director for Accountability, and Maureen Foley, Director for New Charters.

## 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.

# INTRODUCTION AND REPORT FORMAT

## Achievement First Voyager Charter School

### BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for Rochester Preparatory Charter School 3 (“Rochester Prep 3”), a replication of existing True North Rochester Preparatory charter schools, on October 2, 2012. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2016, serving 89 students in Kindergarten during the 2016-17 school year. Having received more applications for enrollment than seats available for the 2017-18 school year, Rochester Prep 3 held its enrollment lottery on April 10, 2017, and established an active waitlist. The school operates in co-located space at 85 St. Jacob Street, Rochester, New York within the Rochester City School District. Rochester Prep 3 is co-located with another True North Preparatory Charter School: True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School – West Campus. At scale, Rochester Prep 3 will serve 576 students in Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grades.

The school’s mission statement states:

**The mission of Rochester Prep is to prepare all students to enter and succeed in college through effort, achievement, and the content of their character.**

Rochester Prep 3 replicates the program in place at two existing True North Preparatory schools, which opened in 2006 and currently serves 2,283 students in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Rochester Prep 3’s academic program engages students in a rigorous and literacy rich course of study. At the youngest grades, students are required to think analytically and interact with their peers to make meaning of the work in which they engage. Teachers and leaders closely monitor and regularly inform parents about students’ progress.

Students with special education needs receive support through the school’s co-teaching model and resource room. Co-teachers in every classroom ensure that students who struggle academically, including those students with Individualized Education Programs (“IEPs”), receive the support they need to be successful. A special education teacher also pushes into classrooms to ensure the effective implementation of each student’s IEP. The special education teachers also pulls students out for resource room instruction according to the mandates set forth in students’ IEPs. Although Rochester Prep 3 does not currently enroll any English language learners (“ELLs”), the school would rely on resources provided by the network to implement a program for providing any ELLs language acquisition services.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of Rochester Prep 3 at the above address on August 16, 2016, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that True North Rochester Preparatory Charter Schools (the “Education Corporation”) with the authority to operate Rochester Prep 3, had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between

## INTRODUCTION AND REPORT FORMAT

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 BENCHMARK 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 1E:

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

*Rochester Prep 3 is establishing strong instructional leadership to support the development of all instructional staff.*

- Rochester Prep 3's leadership is completely focused on learning and scholarship. The school's principal provides weekly feedback to teachers about how to improve their pedagogical practice, focusing in the first year on student engagement strategies and instructional effectiveness. Early in the year, the principal increased the time spent in weekly professional development allowing for more whole school focus on effective instructional methods in the classroom and using data to drive adjustments to instruction. The network provides lesson and unit plans and conducts the analysis of student outcome data, freeing teachers to focus primarily on developing strong instructional practices and delivering high quality lessons.
- The school's primary instructional leader is the principal. Given the small size of the school during its first year of operation, the instructional leadership is adequate to support the development of the teaching staff. Professional development and coaching sessions at the start of the year inculcated teachers in Uncommon's instructional methodology and classroom routines and procedures. After teachers developed competency in those areas, the principal focused on developing teachers' capacities to deliver lesson content effectively. The principal also focused on developing teachers' capacity for peer to peer coaching in order to prepare for the development of the teaching staff as the school grows in future years.

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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);

[scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie\\_fryer\\_revision\\_final.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf); and, [gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf](http://gao.gov/assets/80/77488.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: [www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/](http://www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/).

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- The principal has established a weekly evaluation cycle that continually and effectively improves the practice of the teaching staff. Each cycle begins with the identification of strength and weaknesses in teaching practice during in class observations. Occasionally, the principal will record a lesson and the teacher and principal will debrief the video together. Next, the teachers and the principal use the observation data to set action steps for development. The principal codifies the strategies in electronic communication and follows up in subsequent observations to ensure that teachers demonstrate mastery of deficient skills. The cycle begins again after the principal acknowledges that a teacher has demonstrated mastery of each action step.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1B:

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

*The school regularly gathers assessment data and uses it to improve instruction.*

- The network develops math and English language arts assessments that the school administers twice per year. In addition, teachers administer the STEP reading assessment every 6 weeks in order to track students' growth and proficiency in reading. Teachers, school leaders and staff at the network level use these data to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum and make adjustments as necessary.
- Teachers make data available to parents by calling home every two weeks to report on students' performance in class. The school also requires parents to attend report card conferences at the end of each academic quarter.
- After each interim assessment, the school uses its subsequent professional development day to analyze the resulting data and determine how students performed relative to other schools in the network. Teachers use data from assessments to make action plans and determine which students will require additional supports, such as small group tutoring, which takes place three times during the school day. Lead teachers have the opportunity to work with students in the morning, and special education and other teachers can pull students for tutoring at various times during the school day. Additionally, some teachers have data clipboards that they use to track students' progress during class and make real-time changes to instruction based on whole class trends.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C:

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

*The school has a curriculum that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction.*

- The network creates all curriculum, which teachers access through an online platform. Materials include scope and sequences and pacing charts. Teachers report that the curricular materials provided to them are rigorous and that lessons are adaptable based on the needs of their students.

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- The curriculum warehouse website contains a curriculum map with pacing specific to any given day, and it builds in flexible days to allow for variations in pacing and mastery across classrooms, which allows teachers to adapt instruction based on their classes' needs. One teacher per subject area (read aloud, reading comprehension, reading mastery, writing, math and Core, which includes science and social studies) is responsible for accessing the materials in the curriculum warehouse at least five days prior to the lesson and providing the other members of the team with an overview of the content, as well as photocopies and other curricular materials.
- The operations team at the school supports teachers in acquiring materials they need for instruction. Teachers are able to access curricular documents in all subject areas for both kindergarten and other grades via the curriculum warehouse, and there is a clear system in place for accessing, preparing and disseminating materials to the members of the team.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D:

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

*Instruction at Rochester Prep is consistently purposeful and engaging, despite the fact that a few teachers do not challenge students with questions that develop higher-order thinking and problem solving skills. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted five classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.*

	Total Kindergarten Observations	
Content Area	ELA	2
	Writing	0
	Math	3
	Soc Stu	0
	Science	0
	Total	5

- Teachers consistently deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (5 of 5 classrooms observed). The learning objectives build on students' previous skills and knowledge, and it is evident that lesson plans are differentiated based on skill level. In ELA classrooms, lessons are differentiated based on STEP level, which enables teachers to provide instruction targeted to student needs. Some classrooms have more than one teacher; in some cases, one teacher leads and the other supports, and in others it is not immediately apparent what the role of the second teacher is.

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- Teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (5 of 5 classrooms observed). Teachers consistently circulate around the classroom to monitor student work and provide oral and written feedback to students or narrate trends they observe in student work. While students read in ELA, teachers prompt groups and individual students to sound out words they do not know. Additionally, teachers employed techniques such as “thumbs up/down” and choral responses to assess student understanding of lesson topics before moving on to a new concept.
- Some teachers challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills (3 of 5 classrooms observed). In classrooms where teachers promote higher-order thinking skills, teachers encourage students to state whether they agree with and respond to one another’s answers. Additionally, teachers employ turn-and-talks, which allow students to actively interact with peers when engaging in learning activities. However, in a few classrooms, teachers miss opportunities to clarify when a student gives an incorrect answer or fail to use questioning techniques at all.
- Rochester Prep 3 teachers manage classrooms such that there is a consistent focus on academic achievement (5 of 5 classrooms observed). They regularly utilize techniques from the Teach Like a Champion taxonomy to keep students on task and avoid losing learning time when transitioning from one activity to another, which maximizes the amount of time that students spend on task. 100% of students are generally actively engaged in whole-class instruction; however, on a few occasions during independent practice activities, students who have completed their work or who are unable to move forward in their work due to a misunderstanding are disengaged and/or off task, thus minimizing the effectiveness of the practice time.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F:

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

*Rochester Prep 3 is establishing systems to meet the need of students at risk of academic failure. Co-teachers provide services to students with disabilities in their classrooms. The school enrolled no English language learners during 2016-17.*

- Rochester Prep 3 employs one teacher to oversee the administration of services for students with disabilities. The network’s director of special education for the Rochester region supports Rochester Prep 3’s special education teacher. That teacher also receives support from the special education teacher at Rochester Preparatory Charter School West Campus’s special education teacher. The school does not enroll any English language learners.
- Students with disabilities receive support in their classrooms under the school’s co-teaching model. The school also has a resource room where students requiring pull out supports receive one on one instruction using research based interventions like Wilson Foundations for reading support and reciprocal teaching for mathematics. The school provides all services required in students’ IEPs. Through its robust monitoring practices,

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

the school has identified two additional students that have been referred to the district's committee on special education ("CSE") for evaluation.

- Classroom teachers and special education teachers are able to coordinate regularly, both formally and informally. Given the small size of the school and the low number of students who require special education services, the opportunities and routines for coordination are sufficient to support the three students with IEPs. As the school grows, it will develop more systematic processes for coordination between special education and classroom lead teachers.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2C:

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

*Rochester Prep 3 is developing an organizational structure that will enable it to continue to effectively deliver the educational program.*

- In its first year, Rochester Prep is developing its administrative structure. The principal is the primary academic leader; the school also employs a director of operations. Early in the charter term, the school receives support in providing special education services and (should the school enroll any ELL students in subsequent years) ELL services from the network. The network and Rochester Prep West, the school with which Rochester Prep 3 shares a facility, also provide operational support. In subsequent years, Rochester Prep 3 will build out its own administrative structure and move away from reliance on the network and the co-located school for providing special education and ELL services.
- The school's dean of students supports teachers and instructional leaders in establishing high expectations for student behaviors in classrooms, hallways, and other common areas. Teachers consistently implement the school's system of merits and demerits to indicate to students when they exhibit both undesired and desired behaviors alike. Students were generally on task during instruction and performed orderly transitions inside classrooms between activities and in the hallways between classrooms and common areas.
- Rochester Prep 3 has sufficient resources to meet its goals. Teachers meet as grade teams to plan units and during that time identify any necessary resources. Teachers report that needs are met by the school's leadership or the network, where appropriate.

The network supports Rochester Prep 3 with its student recruitment efforts using the following strategies to meet enrollment and retention targets:

- Direct outreach to families of prospective students;
- School-based information sessions;
- Presentations at community based organizations including those that provide services to families with children with special needs and families where English is not the primary language; and,
- Targeted mailings available in both English and Spanish.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Geoff Rosenberger	Chair	Jim Barger	Trustee
Jean Howard	Trustee	Jim Gleason	Trustee
Jim Ryan	Trustee	Josh Phillips	Trustee
Rebecca Sumner	Trustee	Ron Zarella	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	87	90	103.4	K-1	K-1

### Key Design Elements

Element	Evident?
Intentional standards-driven teaching	+
Consistent, deliberate, and frequent teacher training throughout the school	+
Strategic allocation of resources	+
A program that prepares students for college and that instills higher order thinking	+
A structured and rigorous system of behavioral standards	+
Teachers who embrace their responsibility for authority over the classroom	-
Teachers and administrators who develop close and meaningful relationships with students	+
Educators who expect and demand excellence from all students	+
A school environment that communicates, teaches, and promotes values that build integrity, leadership, character, and the habits that drive success	+

### School Leaders

School Year(s)	Name(s) and Title(s)
2016-17 to Present	Christopher Shaffer, principal

<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.)

# SCHOOL OVERVIEW

## School Visit History

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
April 26, 2017	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability
	Maureen Foley	Director for New Charters

March 14, 2018

Jeffrey Wasbes  
Executive Deputy Director for Accountability  
SUNY Charter Schools Institute  
353 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Mr. Wasbes,

Thank you for sharing the report from your team's visit to Rochester Prep Charter School 3 in April of 2017. We very much appreciate your observations and feedback as we work to grow our school.

I am writing to share the following Factual Corrections on the report, and hope that you will consider and incorporate these corrections as you deem appropriate:

- On page 2 of the document, or page 3 of the PDF, the top paragraph reads "At scale, Rochester Prep 3 will serve 576 students in Kindergarten through 4th grades." In fact, the elementary portion of Rochester Prep Charter School 3 will serve 450 students in grades K-4 at scale. All of Rochester Prep Charter School 3 will serve 810 students in grades K-8 at scale.
- On page 9 of the document, or page 10 of the PDF, Rochester Prep Charter School 3 is listed as serving grades K-1 in 16-17. The school in fact served only grade K during the 2016-17 school year.
- The comments under benchmark 1D explain that in 3 of the 4 areas of observation, the visit team found what it was looking for in 5 out of 5 observations. For one measure the visit team observed what it sought in only 3 of 5 instances (conversely framed- only 2 observations did not demonstrate the desired teaching technique). Thus, we feel that the framing of the summary of the benchmark is excessively negative, and note that when a measure is observed in 3 out of 5 instances, the framing "most" is more appropriate than "some".

Please feel free to reach out if you would like to discuss these factual corrections, or anything else about the report.

Sincerely,



Anna Hall  
Chief Operating Officer

