

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
THE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL -
UNIONDALE*

VISIT DATE: APRIL 30, 2019

REPORT DATE: JUNE 24, 2019

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

SUNY Plaza

353 Broadway

Albany, NY 12246

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www.newyorkcharters.org



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York

A collection of colorful pencils and paper clips on a dark grey background. The pencils are arranged in a fan-like pattern, showing various colors including green, blue, red, pink, orange, yellow, green, orange, blue, purple, and brown. Some pencils have erasers attached. There are also several paper clips in various colors (orange, green, pink, blue, black) scattered around the pencils.

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its April 30, 2019 first year school evaluation visit to the The Academy Charter School – Uniondale ("The Academy – Uniondale").

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 first year 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.

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INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for The Academy – Uniondale on December 12, 2017. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2018 and was chartered to serve 175 students in Kindergarten – 2nd grade during the 2018-19 school year. The school operates in a privately owned facility at 100 Charles Lindbergh Boulevard, Uniondale, New York 11553 within Uniondale Union Free School District. At scale, The Academy – Uniondale is chartered to serve 475 students in Kindergarten – 6th grade.

The Academy – Uniondale is a replication of The Academy Charter School in Hempstead, NY (“The Academy – Hempstead”), which opened its doors in 2009 and has a consistent track record of strong performance, earning a full term five year renewal from the SUNY Trustees in March 2019. Both schools operate with the support of a centralized leadership team (the “network”), which manages and oversees curriculum development, instructional leadership, operations and finance, student and teacher recruitment, human resources, information technology, facility acquisition and maintenance, and back office activities for the schools.

The mission of The Academy – Uniondale is to:



Provide an exceptional interdisciplinary curriculum in a technology-rich environment that challenges students to explore connections across subjects and use experiential learning to bridge the gaps between theory and practice.

As noted below, for first year visits, the Institute focuses on academic program benchmarks, with a particular focus on the emergence of systems and structures that will support a high quality program. In the case of first year visits to replication schools, the Institute looks for evidence that the new school is adapting and implementing highly effective systems and structures from the original school or schools.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of The Academy – Uniondale at the above address on August 27, 2018, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that the school had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between The Academy Charter School (“The Academy” or 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.

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BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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 describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.²

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.

DOES THE ACADEMY-UNIONDALE HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

The Academy – Uniondale has a rigorous assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning. The school utilizes the same comprehensive set of assessments as The Academy – Hempstead and leverages data consistently to adjust instruction and meet the needs of all students.

- The Academy – Uniondale administers assessments that align to state standards and the school's curricula. For English language arts ("ELA"), the school administers the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System ("F&P") and the STAR assessment along with internally developed formal interim assessments and curricular assessments from Teachers College Readers and Writers Project ("TCRWP"). For mathematics, the school administers the STAR assessment along with internally developed interim assessments and curricular assessments from commercial curriculum products Eureka and enVision Math. The network chief academic officer ("CAO") and network director of curriculum and instruction develop interim assessments along with school leaders to ensure rigor and alignment to state standards. Teachers also regularly administer curriculum-based or internally developed formative assessments, such as weekly quizzes and daily exit tickets, in order to track student mastery.

1. An extensive body of research identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades. Selected sources include: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf>; and http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf.

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available at: www.newyorkcharters.org/suny-renewal-benchmarks/.

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- The Academy – Uniondale has an effective process for scoring and analyzing assessments. Teachers use common rubrics for ELA and mathematics at both school locations. The school dedicates time before assessment administration to review expectations and rubrics, then teachers practice scoring together and ask leaders clarifying questions to ensure practices are consistent across schools and classrooms. If leaders notice any inconsistencies in scoring, they address them by explaining the reasoning to teachers in order to avoid discrepancies in scoring.
- Teachers and leaders access and analyze student achievement data through PowerSchool, an online data management system. Teachers use student data to drive lesson planning; for instance, teachers analyzed data to identify the standards students struggled with on the most recent mathematics interim assessment and strategically designed lessons to review those standards. Teachers also formally review student data at six to eight week intervals after F&P and STAR assessment administration to reformat guided reading and other small instructional groups. Network leaders compare assessment results between the two schools to inform the network's school support strategies. For example, the network CAO and network director of curriculum and instruction identified that results for 1st grade students at one of the schools lagged behind the other and provided additional instructional support and intervention as a result.
- The Academy – Uniondale keeps parents apprised of student progress via three formal report cards and family conferences throughout the year. The school sends home reports after STAR and F&P assessments, which provide parents with additional information about student performance and skills to work on at home. Each classroom also sends home a weekly newsletter that includes updated student grades and teacher comments.

DOES THE ACADEMY-UNIONDALE'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

The school's curriculum supports teachers in planning and delivering effective instruction. The Academy Uniondale implements curricula that have proven successful at The Academy – Hempstead, and both school and network leaders closely analyze student achievement data to support teachers and adjust curricular programs as necessary.

- The Academy – Uniondale's curricular framework provides teachers with clearly structured lesson materials that align to state standards. In ELA, the school implements a balanced literacy approach consisting of the TCRWP workshop structures combined

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with materials from ReadyGen, another commercial reading curriculum. The school also uses student F&P levels to inform guided reading groups and materials, and implements Wilson Foundations for phonics instruction. In mathematics, the school uses Eureka Math supplemented with enVision in order to support students' conceptual understanding and mathematics problem solving ability. The school uses Pearson for both science and social studies. The Academy – Uniondale provides teachers with many additional resources, such as leveled reading books to support guided reading. The network CAO and network director of curriculum and instruction oversee the selection of all curricula to ensure alignment to the school's educational program and state standards.

- The network director of curriculum and instruction and instructional coaches provide teachers with supporting materials including curriculum maps and pacing guides that ensure teachers know what to teach and when to teach it. Leaders set the expectation that teachers should follow the lessons as the pacing guides dictate but encourage teachers to add to or modify lessons as needed to meet students' needs. The school has regular systems and structures to support teachers in planning high quality lessons. Teachers develop lesson plans based on the network's curricular framework and submit lesson plans to leaders and other grade team members, who provide written and verbal feedback, which teachers use to make refinements. Finally, the grade team meets to review the final lesson plan and share ideas on how to make the lesson effective. This process helps ensure that lessons are purposeful and high quality.

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IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE ACADEMY-UNIONDALE?

Instruction at The Academy – Uniondale is high quality. Teachers provide effective management in classrooms, and lessons include clear objectives with ample opportunities for higher order thinking and rigorous student discussion. As shown in the table below, during the first year evaluation visit, Institute team members conducted 12 classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

	G R A D E			
	K	1	2	Total
CONTENT AREA				
ELA	4	1	2	7
Math	1	2	1	4
Other	1			1
Total	6	3	3	12

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- Teachers at The Academy – Uniondale consistently deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum (10 out of 12 lessons observed). Teachers state learning objectives and regularly refer to them throughout lessons to reinforce the target skill. Teachers also plan and execute activities that align with the learning objective. For example, in a mathematics lesson on solving word problems with money, students completed a warm up activity reinforcing the value of coin denominations, solved several different types of money word problems, and completed an exit ticket to demonstrate their understanding. Most classrooms utilize a lead teacher and teaching assistant model, and both teachers actively engage in supporting the lesson. In a small number of classrooms, however, the engagement of both adults is less effective; for example, in some lessons, one teacher leads the activity while the second teacher observes, rather than directly supporting students academically.
- Most teachers at The Academy – Uniondale use effective techniques to check for student understanding and adjust instruction accordingly (8 out of 12 lessons observed). In lessons where checks for understanding are effective, teachers frequently use structures such as cold call, choral response, and turn and talks to gauge student understanding, identify misconceptions, and adjust instruction to either highlight strong student examples or address common mistakes. In some classrooms, teachers implement check for understanding structures such as cold calling but miss opportunities to use student responses to illuminate key concepts or misconceptions.
- Teachers at The Academy – Uniondale consistently provide opportunities for students to respond to higher order questions and participate in rigorous discussion and debate (10 out of 12 lessons observed). Teachers require students to apply higher order thinking skills, such as analysis and interpretation, by asking open ended questions and providing frequent opportunities for students to discuss and debate their ideas with each other. For instance, in a read aloud lesson, a teacher prompted students to discuss the differences between two characters in groups using textual evidence, then had individual students share out their ideas and gave other students the opportunity to ask questions and critique the first student’s statement.
- A majority of teachers at The Academy – Uniondale maximize learning time and establish classroom environments focused on academic achievement (10 out of 12 lessons observed). Teachers plan engaging, discussion-based lessons and utilize a variety of strategies such as clapping, timers, and songs to minimize transition time and maintain effective pacing. Additionally, teachers create a supportive classroom environment through practices such as positive narration and systems in which students earn points for making good behavioral choices.

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DOES THE ACADEMY-UNIONDALE HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

The Academy – Uniondale has strong instructional leadership that includes support for teachers from leaders at both the school and network level. Teachers engage in relevant whole-group professional development, and leaders conduct regular classroom observations and provide observation feedback.

- The Academy – Uniondale’s instructional leadership supports the development of the teaching staff. The instructional leadership team at the school consists of the principal and guidance counselor/dean of students. School leaders and teachers receive additional instructional support from network leaders including the CAO, elementary director of curriculum and instruction, director of student services and English as a new language (“ENL”), and instructional coaches in mathematics and ELA. School and network instructional leaders meet regularly, and the CAO conducts weekly cabinet meetings to facilitate the dissemination of instructional information to school leaders and instructional coaches. Network leaders identify a need for additional leadership capacity to support the schools as the network grows and intend to hire an additional director of student services and ENL in the future. In addition to school and network leadership, teacher leaders on each grade level provide instructional support to teachers and lead professional development sessions.
- Instructional leaders at The Academy – Uniondale provide sustained and systematic coaching and supervision. The principal consistently conducts both formal observations and informal spot checks and consistently provides verbal or written feedback on observations to teachers. The principal had conducted two to three formal observations of each teacher at the time of the Institute’s visit and provided feedback according to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, a widely implemented teacher evaluation rubric that assesses teachers in four domains critical to instructional success. These observations form the basis of the principal’s formal evaluation of teachers. The director of student services and ENL also conducts formal and informal classroom observations and provides feedback on teachers’ implementation of supports for at-risk students. Teachers are aware of leaders’ expectations and understand the criteria used in evaluations. The school is developing additional systems and capacity to ensure that teachers continue to receive regular coaching and support as the school grows.

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- The Academy – Uniondale has regular professional development activities that assist teachers in meeting student academic needs. Teachers participate in summer pre-service training during which they learn about the school’s vision, instructional approach, and systems. The school has early dismissal every two weeks so that teachers can engage in professional development on selected instructional topics, such as questioning, curriculum design and implementation, and conferencing with students about written work. In addition to internally developed professional development, teachers regularly attend trainings from external providers and curriculum vendors, such as Foundations and Responsive Classroom. The Academy – Uniondale’s schedule also incorporates common planning time for teachers every other day. Instructional leaders determine teachers’ professional development needs through regular classroom observations and analysis of student assessment results.

DOES THE ACADEMY-UNIONDALE MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK-STUDENTS?

The Academy – Uniondale meets the educational needs of at-risk students through the implementation of a variety of programs and settings. The school has sufficient staff to oversee the effective implementation of these programs.

- The Academy – Uniondale deploys numerous and robust resources to provide academic interventions that address the range of students’ needs. The network director of student services and ENL oversees the effective implementation of programs and structures for at-risk students with the support of the principal and at-risk teachers including academic intervention services (“AIS”), math intervention, reading intervention, and ENL teachers. The school also employs a counselor who provides mandated and non-mandated counseling to students as needed. AIS teachers both push into classrooms and pull students out to ensure at-risk students receive the academic support they need. When pulling students out of ELA lessons, AIS teachers implement Leveled Literacy Instruction (“LLI”), an intensive small group program aimed at developing students’ foundational reading skills. The school recently hired an additional AIS teacher in response to a high number of students requiring academic supports. A child study team (“CST”) that includes the network director of student services and ENL, guidance counselor, general education teachers, AIS teacher, and ESL teacher, meets monthly to discuss individual at-risk students and track their progress. The network director of students supports and

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ENL coordinates with six school districts to provide students requiring related services with speech and language, occupational, and physical therapy as mandated by students' individualized education plans ("IEPs"). The ENL teacher ensures the school's 32 English language learners ("ELLs") receive the language acquisition support they need via the Imagine Learning literacy curriculum. Starting in the 2019-20 school year, The Academy – Uniondale intends to have one integrated co-teaching ("ICT") classroom section in each grade level in order to support at-risk students more effectively.

- The Academy – Uniondale has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with appropriate interventions. The school implements a Response to Intervention ("RTI") approach to identify students in need of academic support, assign them to interventions, and track their progress. The RTI team consists of the network director of student services and ENL, principal, and AIS and ENL teachers. Utilizing the results of STAR and interim assessments, the RTI team identifies students struggling academically and determines the necessary interventions. Students also receive behavioral interventions as needed. The director of student services and ENL refers students to the district Committee on Special Education ("CSE") if the RTI team determines evaluation for special education services is necessary. When enrolling at the school, new families complete a home language survey, and the school administers the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners ("NYSITELL") to students whose survey results indicate they speak a language other than English at home, if warranted.
- The school provides sufficient time and support for ongoing coordination between general and at-risk teachers. At-risk teachers and service providers have set meeting times with general education teachers during which they discuss student performance, determine appropriate supports, and plan curriculum. The principal receives notes from these meetings in order to provide additional oversight. Additionally, general education teachers participate in CST meetings, which enables them to share information about at-risk students' classroom performance and coordinate academic support with at-risk teachers and service providers as needed.

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DOES THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM?

The Academy – Uniondale’s organization works effectively to deliver the educational program. The school receives robust instructional and operational support from network staff and implements systems that create an organized school and classroom environment in which all community members have clear expectations.

- The Academy – Uniondale has an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program effectively. School leaders and teachers receive robust support from network staff, which in addition to instructional leaders includes the executive director, director of operations, director of facilities, community outreach coordinator, and student information specialist. The school also shares a music teacher with The Academy – Hempstead. Network and school staff have clear lines of reporting, and teachers know whom to turn to for instructional and operational support when they need it. Recognizing the need for additional capacity as the organization grows, network and school leaders have strategic plans to add instructional and operational roles in the future. The school utilizes PowerSchool to manage and analyze academic and other student data.
- The Academy – Uniondale has established a safe and orderly environment and strong school culture through the implementation of a consistent management system with clear expectations for students. Teachers utilize a traffic light system and issue formal warnings to address student misbehaviors and reward students with “Academy Bucks” when they exceed expectations. Teachers use the online platform and smartphone application ClassDojo, which allows them to track and reward student behavior and communicate with parents in real time. Students who require additional behavioral interventions receive support from the guidance counselor/dean. The school also has a mentoring program in which older students and/or students who attended The Academy – Hempstead support younger and/or new students in their transition to the school. Students are consistently on task in classrooms, and teachers create a sense of joy by planning and effectively executing age appropriate activities that engage students.

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- The school has allocated appropriate resources in support of achieving its goals. The facility is organized and welcoming and provides sufficient space for academic and other activities including a music room equipped with instruments and musical technology. At the time of the Institute's visit, the school had recently completed facility renovations that will add classrooms and a gymnasium to the space for the 2019-20 school year. Teachers have access to ample curricular materials through a procurement system overseen by the director of operations.

The Academy – Uniondale is authorized to serve 175 students during the 2018-19 school year; its enrollment at the time of the Institute's visit was 177 students, placing it within the Institute's enrollment collar. Specific strategies the school uses to maintain enrollment and retention include:

- maintaining a consistent online presence and providing application information to prospective families via social media and its website;
- translating recruitment and outreach materials into Spanish and other languages in order to reach as many prospective families as possible;
- hosting events and community celebrations to develop relationships with families within and outside the school community; and,
- providing robust supports for students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and ELLs.

DOES THE SCHOOL BOARD WORK EFFECTIVELY TO ACHIEVE THE SCHOOL'S ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOALS?

The Academy's board provides effective oversight of the schools and has been thoughtful and reflective as the organization has grown. Board members have established a clear vision for the schools and have supported The Academy – Uniondale in executing that vision through their experience and community relationships.

- The board has adequate skills, structures, and procedures with which to govern the school. Board members possess a variety of skills, backgrounds, and experiences that enable them to provide effective oversight. Board members also have deep ties to the community, which enables the school to access local resources and engage with community stakeholders. The board implements a committee structure that includes academic, finance, external relations, and grievance committees. The board chair makes

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a presentation to the entire staff during pre-service training at the beginning of the school year, and board members frequently visit the school and speak with teachers about their needs. Additionally, board members regularly attend school events where they speak with parents and students about their experiences at the school. However, the board has not consistently submitted meeting minutes to the Institute according to the requirements in the Charter Agreement; as of the publication of this report, the board had not submitted meeting minutes since February 2019.

- The board is responsive to the schools' needs and has made strategic personnel decisions to ensure the schools have the capacity to operate effectively. In response to the schools' recent growth, the board has in the last year recruited several new members who possess skills and experience critical to the organization as it expands, such as real estate management and finance. In order to enhance its oversight of legal matters pertaining to the school, the board hired a full time in house legal counsel at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. Additionally, the board has identified the need for additional financial capacity, thus it has approved the addition of a chief financial officer ("CFO") to the network who will assist the board in finding additional revenue streams as the organization grows.
- In order to provide rigorous oversight of the schools' fiscal, organizational, and academic health, board members receive regular updates from the executive director and CAO at monthly board meetings and during frequent phone calls. Board members set high expectations for school performance and hold leaders accountable for meeting those expectations.

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

THE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL - UNIONDALE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CHAIR

Reverend Barrington Goldson

VICE CHAIR

Robert Stewart

TREASURER

Stephen Rowley

TRUSTEES

Peter Goldman

Sheila Dancy-Wilkins

Dawn West-Bloise

Roderick Roberts

Beth A. McKenzie

Marie M. Graham

Dale J. James

SCHOOL LEADERS

Chemita Avin, 2018 - Present

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2018-19	175	177	101%	K-2	K-2

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
April 30, 2019	Maureen Foley Keegan Prue	Director for New Charters Program Analyst

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
STEAM Instruction	+
Extended Learning Time	+
Technology	+
Character Education	+
Service Learning	-
Professional Development	+
Staffing	+

