

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
BUFFALO COLLEGIATE
CHARTER SCHOOL*

VISIT DATE: APRIL 17, 2019

REPORT DATE: JUNE 4, 2019

SUNY Charter Schools Institute

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Charter Schools Institute
The State University of New York



CONTENTS

2

Introduction & School Background

4

Benchmark Analysis

13

School Overview

INTRODUCTION & SCHOOL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its April 17, 2019 first year school evaluation visit to the Buffalo Collegiate Charter School ("Buffalo Collegiate").

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 original charter for Buffalo Collegiate on June 8, 2017. The school opened its doors in the fall of 2018, serving 112 students in 4th – 5th grade during the 2018-19 school year. The school leases space at 45 Jewett Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14214 within Buffalo City School District. By the end of the current charter term, Buffalo Collegiate will grow to serve 360 students in 4th – 9th grade. If renewed, the school plans to grow to serve students through 12th grade.

The Buffalo Collegiate mission states:

“With unrelenting determination and a commitment to excellence, Buffalo Collegiate Charter School educates students in 4th - 12th grades to graduate from the college of their choice and serve as our next generation of leaders.

Pursuant to the Institute's inspection of Buffalo Collegiate at the above address on August 10, 2018 (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that Buffalo Collegiate (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.

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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 BUFFALO COLLEGIATE HAVE AN ASSESSMENT SYSTEM THAT IMPROVES INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING?

Buffalo Collegiate regularly administers standardized and other assessments. While individual teachers use assessment results to adjust instruction consistently, school leaders acknowledge a need for a more systematized, schoolwide approach to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of assessment data.

- Students at Buffalo Collegiate take the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (“MAP”) assessment at the beginning and end of the school year, which enables instructional staff to determine students’ progress over time. Buffalo Collegiate also administers internally developed interim assessments in English language arts (“ELA”) and mathematics approximately every eight weeks. Teachers use these results to determine which students require additional academic support and, if necessary, assign students to intervention groups. Students take the iReady diagnostic at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, which measures students’ mastery of ELA and mathematics standards. The iReady assessment incorporates complementary computerized instructional programs to which teachers assign students based on their needs as demonstrated by iReady assessment results. Teachers track students’ reading levels by administering the STEP assessment three times during the school year. Teachers also regularly administer curriculum-based formative and summative assessments, such as weekly quizzes and exit tickets.

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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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BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

- Buffalo Collegiate makes assessment results accessible to parents via an online portal, which also provides information about student behavior and attendance. Parents receive quarterly report cards, and teachers routinely send graded quizzes home for parents to view. Teachers access ELA and mathematics interim assessment results using eDoctrina, an online platform that enables teachers to analyze interim assessment results. Currently, there is no schoolwide system in place to track or report on other assessment results, which school leaders identify as an area of growth for the upcoming school year. The board receives and analyzes assessment results through a dashboard provided by the head of school.
- Teachers at Buffalo Collegiate use interim assessment data to adjust instruction. Teachers meet together after the school administers interim assessments to grade student work and analyze results, which allows them to norm expectations and make scoring consistent across classrooms. After scoring interim assessments, teachers complete a data reflection form, which requires them to identify standards that require reteaching, and submit it to the head of school and director of curriculum and instruction for review and feedback. Individual teachers also use iReady and STEP assessment results to adjust instruction and assign students to intervention groups; however, there currently are no schoolwide systems for tracking and analyzing results from these assessments, which school leaders identify as an area of focus for the future.

DOES BUFFALO COLLEGIATE'S CURRICULUM SUPPORT TEACHERS IN THEIR INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING?

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Buffalo Collegiate has a curriculum that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction. The school implements ELA and mathematics curricula that have proven successful with similar student populations, and teachers have access to ample resources to support their planning and implementation of these curricula.

- Buffalo Collegiate utilizes a variety of commercial and open-source resources to support the development of daily lesson plans. ELA teachers implement a curriculum developed by Teach Like a Champion, an initiative affiliated with the high performing charter school network Uncommon Schools, which provides scope and sequences, unit plans, unit assessments, and daily lesson plans. ELA teachers also utilize whole class novels and guided reading to build students' independent reading skills. In mathematics classes, teachers implement a curriculum from Achievement First, another high-performing charter school network, which is available online. The Achievement First curriculum

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BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

incorporates scope and sequences, unit plans, and lesson plans. Science teachers at Buffalo Collegiate implement the FOSS curriculum, and civics teachers develop curricular materials internally using a textbook and resources from Uncommon Schools.

- Teachers at Buffalo Collegiate know what to teach and when to teach it based on the guiding documents provided by the Teach Like a Champion and Achievement First curricula in ELA and mathematics, respectively. ELA teachers have adapted the Teach Like a Champion curriculum in order to meet the specific needs of the school's students, many of whom are several grade levels behind; for example, some lessons require teachers to adjust the pacing while others necessitate scaffolding vocabulary or specific reading skills. In addition to whole class mathematics instruction using the Achievement First curriculum, students also receive small group instruction during a skills block, which uses a variety of curricular resources, such as EngageNY, to meet students' needs. Teachers have access to ample curriculum materials that support them in meeting the educational needs of all students.

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IS HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT BUFFALO COLLEGIATE?

Instruction at Buffalo Collegiate is generally purposeful, and teachers provide effective management in classrooms. However, few lessons challenge students with questions that develop higher-order thinking and problem solving skills, and teachers frequently miss opportunities to check for student understanding. As shown in the chart below, during the first year visit, Institute team members conducted ten classroom observations following a defined protocol used in all school visits.

CONTENT AREA	GRADE		
	4	5	Total
ELA	1	2	3
Math	2	2	4
Science	1		1
Soc Stu		1	1
Other	1		1
Total	5	5	10

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- Some teachers at Buffalo Collegiate deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum (4 out of 10 lessons observed). In classrooms where the objective is discernible, teachers state the objective and lesson activities clearly convey the purpose of the lesson. If there is more than one teacher in these classrooms, the teachers have clearly defined roles in supporting students and monitoring student work and behavior. In classrooms where the objective is not clear, students engage in learning activities such as note taking or problem solving, but teachers do not explicitly tie these activities to a purposeful standard or goal.
- Few teachers at Buffalo Collegiate effectively use techniques to check for student understanding (2 out of 10 lessons observed). While some teachers occasionally implement strategies for monitoring student work, such as circulating around the classroom while students complete independent practice, few take notes or make discernible adjustments to instruction in response to student performance. In several classrooms, teachers do not implement any techniques to gauge student understanding across the class. Teachers also frequently miss opportunities to ask students questions intended to assess their mastery of skills during the lesson.
- Few teachers at Buffalo Collegiate 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 out of 10 lessons observed). While teachers occasionally implement methods such as turn and talks and discussions of peer work samples to encourage students to interact with each other and analyze and interpret information, these practices are inconsistent. Moreover, most teachers' questions require students to recall basic facts rather than challenging students to engage in higher order thinking. Teachers also rely primarily on students with their hands raised to answer questions, which limits the number of students who are able to engage actively in the lesson.
- Most teachers at Buffalo Collegiate use effective classroom management techniques and routines to create a consistent focus on academic achievement (7 out of 10 lessons observed). Teachers use strategies such as counting, clapping, and timers to minimize transition time and maintain effective lesson pacing. Additionally, teachers implement a system in which students earn or lose points based on behavior choices. When students display low-level misbehaviors such as disengagement or talking out of turn, teachers are able to redirect them effectively without disrupting the flow of the lesson. Occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to redirect students who are off task.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

DOES BUFFALO COLLEGIATE HAVE STRONG INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP?

Buffalo Collegiate is establishing strong instructional leadership and developing systems to support all staff. The school provides regular whole staff professional development activities that increase teachers' ability to meet student needs; however, the amount of time that instructional leaders dedicate to individual teacher coaching and evaluation structures is inconsistent. As a result, the quality of instruction varies significantly across classrooms.

- Buffalo Collegiate's leadership team is establishing an environment of high expectations for teacher and student performance with a clear emphasis on building a strong school culture. The head of school and director of curriculum and instruction are the primary instructional leaders at the school, while the director of operations oversees non-instructional aspects such as facility maintenance, transportation management, and procurement. Because of staffing changes due to departures and family leave, the dean of curriculum and instruction has taken on full time teaching responsibilities since February. Additionally, the dean of culture, who previously oversaw behavior management, transitioned out of the school in February. These staffing changes have resulted in some inconsistencies in the level of support and training teachers receive.
- Buffalo Collegiate's instructional leadership is adequate to support whole group professional development structures. All staff members attend weekly meetings on Friday afternoons during which leaders provide professional development on selected topics. The head of school and dean of curriculum and instruction select targeted topics for Friday meetings based on classroom observations and data; during Year 1, these sessions have primarily focused on classroom management and culture-building techniques. Classroom observations at the time of the Institute's visit indicate that these efforts have been successful in building teachers' capacity to manage classrooms effectively. In addition, after each assessment cycle is complete, leaders conduct a data day protocol in which teachers have dedicated time to study assessment data and plan whole- and small-group interventions and lessons for reteaching.
- Instructional leaders are inconsistent in providing sustained and systematic individual coaching and supervision; as a result, the quality of instruction varies significantly across classrooms. At the beginning of the school year, the head of school and dean of curriculum and instruction divided teachers by content area and conducted weekly observations and check-ins with teachers to provide coaching and feedback. In the latter half of the year, individual teacher coaching and supervision structures have been inconsistent. While staffing changes contributed to challenges in this area, the head of school recognizes the need for improvement and is developing plans to strengthen coaching systems in the year ahead.

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

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- Buffalo Collegiate has not yet begun to conduct formal teacher evaluations based on clear criteria. Instructional leaders intend to use the teacher performance rubric from Uncommon Schools to conduct evaluations but have not yet formally introduced the rubric to teachers. The head of school identifies this as a growth area and plans to introduce the rubric and evaluation process to teachers before the end of the school year.

DOES BUFFALO COLLEGIATE MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF AT-RISK-STUDENTS?

Buffalo Collegiate is developing systems to meet the educational needs of at-risk students. The school deploys sufficient resources and appropriate interventions for students who already have identified disabilities but is still establishing clear screening procedures to identify at-risk students. The school is also still developing structures for ongoing coordination between general education and special education teachers.

- Buffalo Collegiate is developing clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students. The coordinator of special education has primary responsibility for overseeing supports for at-risk students. At the time of the Institute's visit, the coordinator of special education was on family leave, and a teacher who is certified in special education was fulfilling those duties. Leaders regularly review data from the iReady and MAP assessments to track student growth over time and identify students in need of additional support. Leaders assign students to small groups throughout the day in order to provide targeted support in areas where students are struggling. Teachers and leaders stay in regular contact with parents of students receiving interventions in order to update parents on their student's progress. The teachers leading small groups keep anecdotal records on student progress, but the school does not have systems in place to formally monitor progress for students in various tiers of Response to Intervention ("RTI"). Teachers know which of their students are at risk, but leaders do not clearly communicate the system for formal referral of students to the committee on special education ("CSE") when RTI interventions do not yield progress. The school recognizes the need to establish stronger systems and structures to monitor progress for at-risk students and plans to make this a priority in the future. Buffalo Collegiate does not currently enroll any English language learners ("ELLs"), but operations staff review students' records from their previous schools to determine if any students were identified as ELLs, and administer the Home Language Survey and New York State Identification Test for English Language Learnings ("NYSITELL") if existing records do not reflect the student's status. While the school did make good faith efforts to recruit ELLs during its pre-opening period, feedback from families who withdrew or did not ultimately enroll indicated that uncertainty about location and transportation drove their decisions to enroll elsewhere.

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- Buffalo Collegiate deploys sufficient resources including staff, classes, and settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The coordinator of special education ensures that the school implements interventions and settings in accordance with students' needs and students' individualized education programs ("IEPs"). The school implements a mix of in-class integrated co-teaching ("ICT") services and pull out resource room supports. Buffalo Collegiate employs three full time special education certified teachers; two of these teachers work primarily as the special education teachers in ICT classrooms, while the third primarily leads small group SETSS instruction. Additionally, the school contracts with an external provider to implement related services such as occupational therapy and employs a full-time social worker to provide counseling for students who require these services.
- The school does not yet implement formal systems and supports for ongoing coordination between general education teachers and special education teachers and service providers. General education and special education teachers at Buffalo Collegiate collaborate primarily through informal conversation during preparation periods or before and after school. At the beginning of the year, the coordinator of special education reviewed student IEPs with special education teachers. However, teachers have not received training on strategies to support and differentiate lessons for students with disabilities.

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

Buffalo Collegiate is establishing administrative systems to ensure that the organization works effectively to deliver the academic program. School leaders have adapted operational systems and shifted resources as necessary in order to carry out the academic program while accommodating ongoing facility construction and staffing adjustments.

- Buffalo Collegiate is establishing an administrative structure that will allow it to carry out the academic program. The leadership team includes the head of school, dean of curriculum and instruction, and director of operations. The operations fellow and coordinator of special education provide additional administrative support in their areas of expertise. There are clear lines of reporting and the leadership team meets regularly with each other and with their direct reports. Ongoing building construction and staff changes have required the leadership team to adapt and adjust staffing, operational systems, and procedures throughout the year. For instance, ongoing construction

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

required the team to change student arrival and entry procedures several times throughout the school year to ensure safety. Additionally, leaders modified the school schedule several times in response to changes in staffing. At the time of the Institute's visit, school leaders had in place consistent systems and were planning to ensure that procedures and scheduling are consistent and sustainable for the school's second year.

- The school is establishing a safe and orderly environment. Buffalo Collegiate's facility is clean and well-organized, and there is space for teachers and other school staff to carry out the activities required to meet students' instructional needs. Leaders and teachers identify classroom culture and behavior management as areas in which the school initially struggled; this resulted in relatively high suspension rates through the first half of the year. Recognizing this as a growth area, school leaders conducted professional development on restorative practices and instituted positive behavior intervention systems such as a Dean's List and PRIDE points, which students can earn for positive behaviors and save up to earn special privileges or rewards. The school also hired a social worker and behavior intervention specialist in response to its classroom management struggles to increase its capacity to support a safe and orderly environment. At the time of the Institute's visit, the school culture reflected an orderly environment which places value on learning.
- Buffalo Collegiate allocates sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals. Teachers have access to curricular materials that support high quality instruction and know the process for requisitioning additional materials. There is an appropriate number of staff and the school worked with urgency to fill mid-year vacancies due to resignations and family leave.
- School leaders recognize that enrollment of students with disabilities and ELLs is a necessary focus area in order to meet enrollment and retention targets. Specific strategies the school is using to increase enrollment and retention include:
 - Sending targeted enrollment mailers to specific zip codes with a higher proportion of new immigrant families;
 - Connecting with community based organizations including refugee resettlement agencies in order to build stronger ties with families who may have ELLs;
 - Visiting a variety of pre-school, daycare, and after-school care facilities within the community to meet prospective families; and,
 - Maintaining robust communication with families after they are accepted in the lottery.

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

The Buffalo Collegiate board works effectively to provide oversight to the school. Board members possess a variety of skills and backgrounds that have supported the school throughout its planning year and first year of operation. However, the board does not consistently meet all reporting requirements in a timely fashion.

- The Buffalo Collegiate board members have skills, structures, and procedures in place to govern the school. Board members possess professional and other experience in a variety of areas including education, law, management, finance, and real estate, which enable individual board members to contribute to areas critical to the school's success. The board's makeup has changed somewhat since Buffalo Collegiate received its authorization in order to meet the governance needs of the school as it grows; currently, about half of the original board members remain. The board utilizes a committee structure that includes academic and enrollment, finance and facilities, governance, and development committees. Additionally, board members have attended trainings and convenings aimed at developing the board's oversight capacity, and in November all board members participated in a board retreat.
- The board receives sufficient information from the school leader to provide rigorous oversight. The board receives a monthly dashboard that includes information about student assessment results, attendance, enrollment, finances, facilities updates, and human capital. Committees also receive information pertinent to their specific areas of school oversight, which committees analyze during meetings that occur at least monthly.
- The board has developed clear criteria for evaluating the head of school. Board members utilize a rubric provided by Building Excellent Schools ("BES"), which evaluates the head of school in key domains related to school leadership including the academic program, financial management, and organizational health. The board completed a formal evaluation of the head of school at the end of the planning year and was planning to conduct the head of school's evaluation for Year 1 shortly after the date of the Institute's visit.
- Buffalo Collegiate's board does not consistently meet all board requirements in a timely fashion. For instance, at the time of the Institute's visit, the school had not submitted board meeting minutes for several of its most recent meetings.

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

BUFFALO COLLEGIATE CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CHAIR

Jamel Perkins

VICE CHAIR

Katie Campos

TREASURER

Mike Roach

SECRETARY

Colleen Heidinger

TRUSTEES

Rachelle Robinson

Steven Harvey

Valerie Kaufman

James Ervin Mulka

Gary Damon, Jr.

SCHOOL LEADERS

Brian Pawloski, (2018 - Present)

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	PROPOSED GRADES	ACTUAL GRADES
2018-19	120	114	95%	4-5	4-5

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SCHOOL OVERVIEW

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF VISIT	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
April 17, 2019	Maureen Foley Keegan Prue	Director for New Charters Program Analyst

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS:

ELEMENT	EVIDENT?
High Expectations	+
Family Partnerships	+
Purposeful School Design	+
Focus on Literacy and Mathematics Instruction	+
Individualized and Differentiated Supports	-
Focus on Developing Talent	-
Robust Character Education	+
Structured and Joyful School Environment	+

