



# First Year School Evaluation Report Storefront Academy Charter School

Visit Date: June 15, 2016  
Report Date: July 26, 2016

State University of New York  
41 State Street, Suite 700  
Albany, New York 12207

(518) 445-4250  
[www.newyorkcharters.org](http://www.newyorkcharters.org)



### INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") analysis from its June 15, 2016 first year school evaluation visit to the Storefront Academy Charter School. The visit team consisted of Heather Wendling, Director for New Charters, and Jeff Wasbes, Executive Deputy Director for Accountability.

### 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, as well as reports provided 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 primarily 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.

## SCHOOL BACKGROUND

### Storefront Academy Charter School

#### BACKGROUND

The SUNY Trustees approved the charter for Storefront Academy Charter School (“Storefront”) on June 4, 2014. Modeled after Storefront Academy Harlem (“Storefront Harlem”), an independent, tuition-free, private school founded in 1966, the school opened its doors in the fall of 2015 serving 100 students in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Having received more applications for enrollment than seats available for the 2016-17 school year, Storefront held its enrollment lottery on April 5, 2016, and established active waitlists for K-2<sup>nd</sup> grades. The school operates in private leased space located at 416 Willis Avenue, Bronx, in New York City Community School District (“CSD”) 7. At scale, Storefront will serve 288 students in grades K-5 in this charter term.

The school’s mission statement states:

**Storefront Academy seeks to provide children of varied academic strengths quality educational opportunities, preparing them academically, socially and emotionally to become critical thinkers, high-achieving students and well-rounded individuals. Working in partnership with families and community members, Storefront Academy instills a powerful sense of self, and gives its students the tools to own the future and create meaningful adult lives.**

Storefront provides between 90-150 minutes of literacy instruction each day, through reading and writing programs anchored in New York State Common Core aligned learning modules. The school provides between 75-90 minutes of mathematics, 45 minutes of social studies, and 60 minutes of science instruction daily. The school also offers instruction in art, music, physical education and health.

Storefront systematically addresses the needs of all students through a Response to Intervention (“RtI”) program with increasing levels of intervention and support based on student need. The school offers Integrated Co-Teaching (“ICT”) settings at each grade level and Special Education Teacher Support Services (“SETSS”) to serve students with disabilities. The school employs a full-time academic intervention coordinator to provide pull-out instruction for English language learners (“ELLs”) and support teachers in implementing strategies for meeting the language acquisition needs of ELLs in their classrooms.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of Storefront at the above address on August 17, 2015, (and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto), the Institute determined that Storefront (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 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 1B:

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

*Storefront gathers a wealth of assessment and evaluation data and is developing strong systems to improve student learning.*

- The school administers a variety of assessments and analyzes the resulting data to monitor student growth and the overall effectiveness of the academic program. The school uses the Fountas and Pinnell assessment ("F&P") to gauge students' reading levels. Teachers use the reading level data to assign students to small instructional groups with lessons tailored to students' reading abilities. The school also administers the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress ("MAP") assessment to measure the effectiveness of the curriculum and make adjustments to the scope and sequence of the English language arts ("ELA") and mathematics programs. In its first year, Storefront is developing strong assessment and data systems to monitor the effectiveness of its program and overall student achievement.
- Teachers maintain detailed running records on student academic behaviors, habits and performance. They confer with students weekly to review performance and set performance goals for the upcoming week. Teachers and instructional leaders triangulate these data with reading level assessment results to identify professional development needs and to measure student growth and achievement. School leaders provide these results to the school's board and student caregivers. The school requires caregivers to pick up quarterly student report cards during parent teacher conference nights. In addition, teachers communicate with families informally about students' academic progress via phone calls and email.

---

<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

- Teachers monitor the various data sources to adjust instruction in order to meet the learning needs of students. The data analyses inform teachers' adjustments to lessons provided by the commercial curriculum. These adjustments ensure that teachers group students appropriately for guided reading instruction and that teachers target the skills and abilities in which students demonstrate deficiencies. Teachers also regularly use formative assessment data to adjust lessons for whole group instruction and, where data indicate students perform below grade level expectations, for whole group re-teaching of particular standards.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C:

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

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

- The school's commercial curricular materials provide detailed scope and sequence documents in mathematics and ELA. Teachers refer to these documents to know what to teach and when to teach it. After recognizing that the curriculum sequence did not align precisely with the assessments the school uses to gauge the effectiveness of the curriculum, leaders responded by adjusting the curriculum sequence and adding more targeted interim assessments to ensure alignment for next year.
- Teachers access sufficient curriculum resources. Each classroom features a well-stocked library of leveled reading materials, manipulatives, and blocks. These resources, along with a comprehensive curriculum framework and detailed lesson plans, support teachers in creating engaging and academically rich lessons.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D:

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

*High quality instruction is evident in all Storefront classrooms. 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.*

		Grade		
Content Area		K	1	Total
	ELA	2	3	5
	Math	1		1
	Total	3	3	6

- Teachers adapt the commercial curriculum plans to design and deliver purposeful lessons that align to the school's curriculum and the state learning standards (6 of 6 classrooms observed). Teachers regularly customize materials to meet the specific learning needs of students and to make lessons relevant to their daily lives. Teachers plan engaging learning activities and deliver lessons with ease and confidence. Co-teachers have clearly defined roles. Every adult in each classroom works directly with students in learning activities.

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

- Teachers monitor student work to gauge their understanding of lesson content (6 of 6 classrooms observed). Co-teachers circulate to review written work and probe students to defend responses. Teachers question students with prompts designed to push the lesson forward and to deepen student understanding. Teachers confer with students individually and privately as part of their weekly routine. During these conferences, teachers make notes on student learning and positively reinforce positive academic habits that contribute to learning.
- Few teachers challenge students with opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills (2 of 6 classrooms observed). Instruction is generally teacher centered. Teachers do not generate opportunities to probe students to defend responses or to dig deeper on lesson material. In a notable exception, the teacher in a reading class required students to analyze a picture along with the text and predict what might happen next. In a few rare cases, students interact with peers to analyze the content of a lesson and read together.
- Teachers establish clear classroom routines that are consistent throughout the school (6 of 6 classrooms observed). The school's well-rehearsed routines are effortless; students respond immediately, in concert and with fidelity. Transitions are fluid and efficient, allowing teachers to maximize learning time. Although teachers generate high levels of student engagement, some students opt out of learning while in independent stations during center based activities.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1E:

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

*Storefront is establishing strong instructional leadership to support the development of all teachers through robust coaching and feedback cycles.*

- In its first year of operation, the school's founding principal as well as an assistant principal and instructional coach (the latter two split their time between Storefront Harlem and Storefront Bronx) comprise the instructional leadership team. The instructional leadership team is establishing an environment of high expectations for both teacher and student performance across the school with a palpable emphasis on high quality instruction and growth. Leaders and teachers clearly articulate the school's specific performance goals, which focus on students demonstrating grade level proficiency as defined by the F&P and MAP assessments.
- Storefront's instructional leadership team is adequate to provide comprehensive coaching and personalized support for the school's current six teachers. However, to provide even more frequent observations and feedback as the school adds additional staff members in year two, the school plans to hire an assistant principal to be at the Bronx campus full time.
- In addition to multiple classroom observations per week, each followed by actionable written feedback notes for teachers, instructional leaders conduct at least one comprehensive, formal, video-recorded classroom observation per year for staff review that also includes a self-evaluation component. The principal provides a combination of in the moment and occasional brief written feedback to teachers after informal observations, but has not yet implemented a method to distribute feedback in a well-documented or systematic way. The instructional coach utilizes a written feedback form that highlights



## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

strengths, quick fixes and action steps to improve instruction immediately; the coach shares these forms with teachers via email promptly after each observation for discussion at regular meetings.

- Storefront supports teachers' efforts to meet students' needs and holds teachers accountable for delivering high quality instruction through regular professional development activities. School leaders require teachers to attend a two week long orientation before the school year commences; professional development continues with weekly half day workshops and sessions throughout the year; leaders also encourage and provide stipends for teachers to seek external professional development opportunities such as workshops and conferences.
- The school principal primarily uses classroom observation and assessment data to determine teachers' professional development needs. According to teachers, professional development activities effectively address school-wide issues, strengthen existing skills and reset school wide instructional priorities as necessary. The instructional priorities in the school's first year have been for teachers to build facility with the curriculum and establish a joyful and rigorous school culture.
- The principal evaluates all teachers and assistant teachers using a formal evaluation rubric. Teachers and staff are familiar with the evaluation criteria and find the tool fair and transparent.

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F:

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

*Storefront is addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities, English language learners and struggling students in need of intervention.*

- Storefront uses appropriate procedures and assessments to identify students with disabilities, those struggling academically and English language learners ("ELLs"). Teachers use diagnostic and progress monitoring assessments, such as the F&P and MAP, as well as teacher observations to identify students in need of extra supports. Storefront uses the Home Language Identification Survey and the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners to identify students in need of language acquisition support.
- The school deploys significant resources to meet the needs of students at risk of academic failure and students with disabilities. The school staffs each classroom with two adults and has an integrated co-taught classroom at each grade level with a certified special educator to support students with special learning needs. Teachers also support struggling students during pull out small group instruction, utilizing F&P's Leveled Literacy Intervention System materials. The school's academic intervention coordinator currently provides individualized academic and language supports to Storefront's 16 ELL students.
- Storefront provides adequate time and support for on-going coordination between general and special education teachers, with weekly scheduled common planning periods. Teachers use this time to review data, discuss student progress, share instructional strategies and plan lessons. Teachers are generally aware of students' academic needs.

## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

### SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2C:

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

*The school organization supports the delivery of the educational program.*

- The school is establishing an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. Staff members report that lines of reporting and accountability are clear.
- Through a school wide focus on responsive classroom discipline and positive framing, the school is establishing a safe and orderly environment for students and staff.
- The school has allocated sufficient resources in support of achieving its goals.
- School leaders are creating the systems and protocols necessary to ensure a well-functioning school organization.

Storefront staff members use the following strategies to meet enrollment and retention targets:

- Reaching out to numerous community pre-Kindergarten and daycare programs in the area to disseminate information about the school, including guidance on how to apply and the overall lottery process;
- Hosting multiple open houses, school tours, and question and answer sessions in the community as well as enrollment sessions at their existing school location;
- Consistently updating program information about the school's model and program via social media; and,
- Providing school and enrollment materials translated into Spanish.

### 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 oversight to the total educational program.*

- Board members possess adequate skills and expertise with which to effectively govern the school, including education, law, finance, development and non-profit governance. Several community members and parent representatives also serve on the board to contribute those perspectives.
- The board receives plentiful information from the schools' executive director and principal to provide rigorous oversight. School leaders provide comprehensive reports to the board at each monthly meeting that include a full dashboard reporting on numerous metrics, including assessment, attendance, financial and other timely data. This information is adequate to inform the board's strategic planning and goal setting; in its first year of operation, the trustees have focused on the school's facilities issues and establishing Storefront's presence in the Mott Haven community. In the school's second year, the board will oversee the school's transition to a new facility. They also hope to establish a full



## QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

summer program, available to all students, to prevent learning loss, and gain approval to add a pre-Kindergarten program.

- While Storefront Harlem's board completes an annual evaluation for the schools' executive director, the Storefront Bronx board has not yet decided on a clear and comprehensive set of criteria with which to evaluate the leader's performance. The board has not yet identified or utilized a tool to evaluate its own performance.

## SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Jonathan Stearns	Chair	Ray Cameron	Trustee
Wendy Reynoso	Vice Chair	Richard Bayles	Trustee
Charlie Flynn	Treasurer	Angela Bergeson	Trustee
Daniel Sternberg	Trustee	Carrie Sealy	Trustee
Jason Duchin	Trustee	Eileen Niedzwiecki	Trustee
Michael Officer	Trustee		

### Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment <sup>4</sup>	Actual as a Percentage of Chartered Enrollment	Proposed Grades	Actual Grades
2015-16	100	99	99%	K-1	K-1

### Key Design Elements

Element	Evident?
A rigorous, intentional and joyful community of learners, including interactive and collaborative learning every day;	+
Holistic supports for learners through small school and class sizes, as well as a Response to Intervention team to address academic, psychosocial, developmental and behavioral needs; and,	+
Utilizing evidence to understand, reflect, decide and act to ensure a culture of accountability and transparency.	+

### School Leaders

School Year(s)	Name(s) and Title(s)
2015-16 to Present	Elisa Istueta, Executive Director Lisette Nieves, Principal

### School Visit History

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Members	Title
June 15, 2016	Heather Wendling	Director for New Charters
	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

<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.)

