2015-16 School Evaluation Report

HARLEM LINK CHARTER SCHOOL

Visit Date: June 7, 2016
Report Date: July 5, 2016

INTRODUCTION

This School Evaluation Report offers an analysis of evidence collected during the school visit on June 7, 2016. While the SUNY Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute") conducts a comprehensive review of evidence related to all the State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks (the "SUNY Renewal Benchmarks") near the end of a charter term, most mid-cycle school evaluation visits focus on a subset of these benchmarks. This subset, the Qualitative Education Benchmarks, addresses the academic success of the school and the effectiveness and viability of the school organization. It provides a framework for examining the quality of the educational program, focusing on teaching and learning (i.e., curriculum, instruction, assessment and services for at-risk students), as well as leadership, organizational capacity and board oversight. The Institute uses the established criteria on a regular basis to provide schools with a consistent set of expectations leading up to renewal.

Appendix A to the report contains a School Overview with descriptive information about the school, including enrollment and demographic data, as well as historical information regarding the life of the school. It also provides background information on the conduct of the visit, including information about the evaluation team and puts the visit in the context of the school's current charter cycle. Appendix B displays the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks.

This report does not contain an overall rating or comprehensive indicator that would specify at a glance the school's prospects for renewal. Rather, it summarizes various strengths of the school and notes areas in need of improvement based on the Qualitative Education Benchmarks. The Institute intends this selection of information to be an exception report in order to highlight areas of concern. As such, limited detail about positive elements of the educational program is not an indication that the Institute does not recognize other indicators of program effectiveness.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

Opening Information

Date Initial Charter Approved by SUNY Trustees	July 12, 2004
Date of School Opening	September 5, 2005

Location and 2015-16 Enrollment

Address	District	Facility	Chartered Enrollment	Grades
20 West 112th Street New York, NY 10026	NYC CSD 3[1]	Public	386	K-5

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[1] Because it is the district of origin for the majority of Harlem Link students, the Institute uses CSD 5 as the district of comparison for the school's Accountability Plan.

2014-15 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

During 2014-15, the third year of its five year Accountability Period, Harlem Link Charter School ("Harlem Link") did not meet either of its key academic Accountability Plan goals in English language arts ("ELA") or mathematics. The school met its science and No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") goals.

ELA

Harlem Link did not meet its ELA goal during 2014-15, having met none of the individual measures during 2013-14 and 2014-15. The percentage of students enrolled in at least their second year scoring at or above proficiency on the state's ELA exam declined to 13 percent in 2014-15. Most notably, the school's proficiency rate for 5th graders enrolled in at least their second year decreased by 15 percentage points from 17 to only two percent. Further, Harlem Link's ELA achievement did not surpass that of New York City Community School District 5 (the "district"), with the school underperforming the district by one percentage point. In comparison to schools across the state with similar proportions of students who are economically disadvantaged, the school performed lower than expected, as it had throughout the entire Accountability Period. Harlem Link also failed to meet its ELA growth measure, posting a mean growth score seven percentile points below the target of the state median.

Mathematics

Harlem Link did not meet its mathematics goal in 2014-15. Although the school outperformed the district, the percentage of the school's students enrolled in at least their second year and scoring at or above proficiency declined by over 26 percentage points since 2013-14. As with ELA, the school's mathematics proficiency rate for 5th graders fell dramatically from 46 to only seven percent. In comparison to schools across New York State enrolling similar concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, Harlem Link performed lower than expected. After meeting its growth measure during the first two years of its Accountability Period, the school's growth score dropped below the target mean percentile to 33. Concomitant with declining absolute performance, the mean growth percentile for 5th grade dropped 39 percentile points below the target to 11.

Science

Harlem Link met its science goal in 2014-15 with 87 percent of the school's 4th graders scoring at or above proficiency on the state's science exam. The school outperformed the district by over 19 percentage points.

NCLB

Harlem Link met its NCLB goal by remaining in good standing under the state's accountability system.

		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Enrollment (N) Receiving Mandated Academic Services		(55)	(57)	(48)
Results	Tested on State Exams (N)	(32)	(32)	(26)
	School Percent Proficient on ELA Exam	3.1	3.1	7.7
	Percent Proficient Statewide	5.0	5.2	5.8

		2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
ELL Enrollment (N)		(20)	(20)	(14)
Results	Tested on NYSESLAT[2] Exam (N)	(19)	(18)	(9)
	School Percent 'Commanding' or Making Progress[3] on NYSESLAT	15.8	44.4	22.2

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[2] New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test, a standardized state exam.

[3] Defined as moving up at least one level of proficiency. As of 2014-15, student scores can fall into five categories/proficiency levels: Entering (formerly Beginning); Emerging (formerly Low Intermediate); Transitioning (formerly Intermediate); Expanding (formerly Advanced); and, Commanding (formerly Proficient).
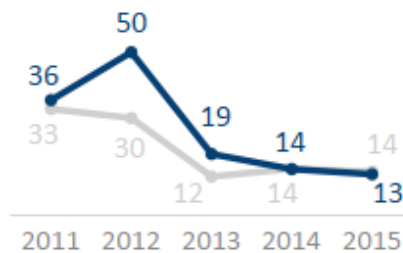
Harlem Link Charter School

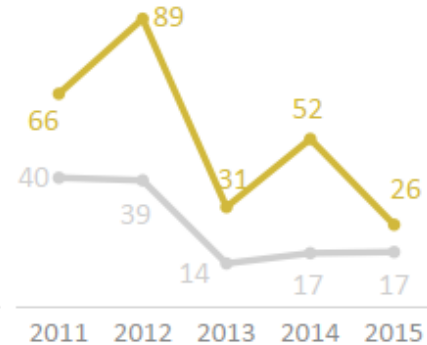| REQUIRED MEASURE DESCRIPTION | ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL | MATHEMATICS ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL |

Comparative Measure: District Comparison. Each year, the percentage of students at Harlem Link in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in ELA and mathematics will be greater than that of students in the same tested grades in CSD 3.
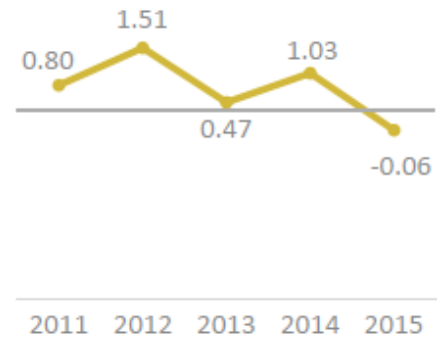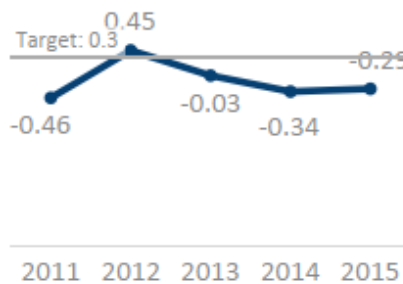
ELA: 2011: 36/33, 2012: 50/30, 2013: 19/12, 2014: 14/14, 2015: 13/14

Math: 2011: 66/40, 2012: 89/39, 2013: 31/14, 2014: 52/17, 2015: 26/17

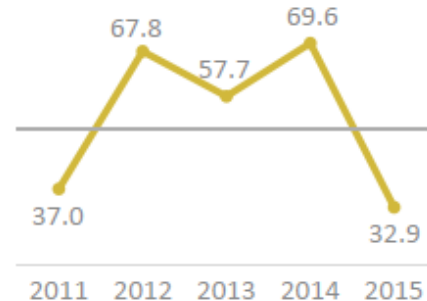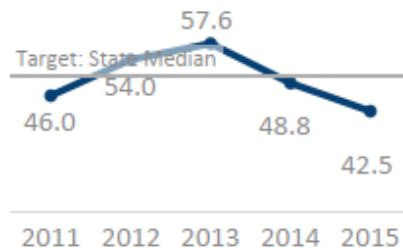**Comparative Measure: Effect Size.** Each year, the school will exceed its predicted level of performance by an Effect Size of 0.3 or above in ELA and mathematics according to a regression analysis controlling for economically disadvantaged students among all public schools in New York State.

ELA (Target: 0.3): 2011: -0.46, 2012: 0.45, 2013: -0.03, 2014: -0.34, 2015: -0.29

Math: 2011: 0.80, 2012: 1.51, 2013: 0.47, 2014: 1.03, 2015: -0.06

Comparative Growth Measure: Mean Growth Percentile. Each year, Harlem Link's unadjusted mean growth percentile for all students in grades 4-8 will be above the state's unadjusted median growth percentile in ELA and mathematics.

ELA (Target: State Median): 2011: 46.0, 2012: 54.0, 2013: 57.6, 2014: 48.8, 2015: 42.5

Math: 2011: 37.0, 2012: 67.8, 2013: 57.7, 2014: 69.6, 2015: 32.9

SCIENCE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN GOAL

Science: Comparative Measure. Each year, the percentage of students at the school in at least their second year performing at or above proficiency in science will exceed that of students in the same tested grades in the district.

2011: 73 / 100
2012: 69 / 100
2013: 76 / 100
2014: 91 / 99
2015: 68 / 88
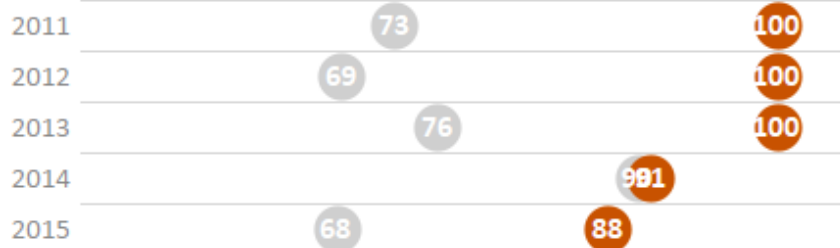
BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

QUALITATIVE EDUCATION BENCHMARKS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,[4] 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.[5]

Use of Assessment Data

Harlem Link collects a multitude of student assessment data but does not use the information to drive meaningful changes to the planning and delivery of instruction in order to accelerate student learning.

- Harlem Link administers a number of assessments throughout the school year. Teachers use the Developmental Reading Assessment ("DRA") to measure students' reading fluency and comprehension at the beginning and end of the school year in testing grades and three times per year in Kindergarten – 2nd grades. Teachers also administer EdVistas ELA and mathematics assessments three times per year. School leaders note plans to discontinue administration of some of these assessments as the school has found little utility in the results. Teachers also administer school-created unit assessments throughout the school year.
- The school does not use a valid and reliable process for scoring and analyzing assessments. Teachers grade their own students' work and do not norm scoring. The school's instructional manual includes a post-unit protocol that emphasizes the importance of calibrating grading in order to ensure consistent rigor across classrooms, but grade teams do not use this protocol.
- Teachers receive detailed analyses of DRA and EdVistas results by performance standard, grade and class. The analyses do not disaggregate the performance of at-risk students to compare their progress to that of their peers.

Curriculum

Harlem Link's curriculum supports teachers in daily instructional planning, but it is unclear that the existing materials provide sufficient coverage of all necessary grade level standards.

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[4] 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; scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/dobbie_fryer_revision_final.pdf; and, gao.gov/assets/80/77488.pdf.
[5] 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/.

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- Harlem Link has a curriculum framework that guides instruction across all grades and subjects but has not determined the degree to which its framework aligns to state performance standards. The school takes a balanced literacy approach to ELA; teachers use Reader's & Writer's Workshop to guide instruction. In mathematics, Harlem Link builds instruction with TERC and Contexts for Learning. The school also piloted Cognitively Guided Instruction in nine classrooms this school year. FOSS and Insights serve as the basis for the school's science program, which culminates in a school-wide expo during which students across grades showcase their work.

- Scope and sequence documents for each subject and grade combine with unit overviews to provide a bridge between the curriculum framework and daily lesson plans. With these documents, teachers know what to teach on a day-to-day basis. However, the school has no process to compare grade level curriculum content to state performance standards. As such, it is unclear that the totality of instruction provides students with sufficient depth and breadth of exposure to grade level concepts to demonstrate mastery on state tests.

- Harlem Link does not have a systematic process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum documents. The director of curriculum and professional learning works with grade teams to make adjustments to unit plans regularly, but these tweaks do not rise to the level of a deliberate, coherent mechanism that uses student performance data, teacher feedback and classroom observations to inform meaningful changes to curriculum.

- Grade team teachers work together to develop daily ELA, mathematics and social studies lessons in two-week batches. Instructional leaders expect classroom teachers to adapt the grade team's "Main Plan" to meet individual students' needs with differentiated instructional strategies and/or activities. The extent to which this happens on a regular basis is unclear as the visit team saw little evidence of differentiation during classroom observations.

Pedagogy

Isolated pockets of high quality instruction are evident in some classrooms, but most Harlem Link instruction lacks rigor. As shown in the chart below, during the visit, Institute team members conducted 11 classroom observations using a defined protocol used in all school evaluation visits.

		Grade						Total
		K	1	2	3	4	5	
Content Area	ELA	2	1	2	1		1	7
	Math			1		2		3
	Writing						1	1
	Total	2	1	3	2	2	1	11

- Most teachers deliver purposeful lessons with activities aligned to clear learning objectives (8 of 11 classrooms observed). Teachers deliver instruction requiring independent practice or direct instruction with ease and confidence. Co-teachers have clearly articulated roles and promote student engagement through well-rehearsed and executed lessons. However, some teachers struggle to implement centers based activities. In one ELA classroom, the variety of concurrent activities became too overwhelming to the point that both teachers and students were unclear about how to progress through the lesson.

- A slight majority of teachers regularly use effective techniques to check for student understanding (7 of 11 classrooms observed). Teachers cold call students for a quick survey of responses across the class to ensure their understanding. In many cases, co-teachers circulate throughout the room to monitor student written work and help students reason through errors. Despite these practices, in most classrooms, teachers do not use these checks to adjust instruction in order to meet students' learning needs.

- Few teachers include opportunities in their lessons for students to grapple with higher order thinking and problem solving skills (4 of 11 classrooms observed). Where teachers successfully approach higher order thinking activities, they manage to challenge students to defend their responses by prompting them to provide further information about their reasoning. In most cases, questioning relies on factual recall and description of rote procedures. Where teachers require students to engage each other, students simply take turns responding to each other in low level terms rather than engaging deeply in the lesson content.

- Teachers struggle to keep students on task with only a slight majority of classrooms utilizing effective techniques to keep students consistently focused on academic achievement (6 of 11 classrooms observed). Notwithstanding the school's recent transition to a new school wide discipline system, teachers have inconsistent expectations for student behavior across classrooms. Most teachers tolerate low-level misbehavior such as talking and acting out. Some teachers allow students to opt out of learning for long periods. Minor disturbances in classrooms distract students from fully engaging in what would otherwise be appropriate and thoughtful learning activities. Without consistent procedures and behavioral expectations in place, teachers waste valuable tracts of learning time explaining rules and allowable student activities.

Instructional Leadership

The school's expansive instructional leadership team provides frequent coaching and feedback to teachers; however, the delineation of responsibilities among the various roles is confusing to both teachers and leaders as evidenced by the failure of instructional leaders to ensure that the school's curriculum aligns to the state's standards.

- Harlem Link's instructional leadership team includes the principal who coordinates the activities of the school's three assistant principals, the director of curriculum and learning, and the manager of coaching and assessment. The school also contracts with three external ELA and math consultants. This school leadership structure should be sufficient to support the development of the teaching staff; however, teachers report confusion about the delineation of responsibilities between the various roles. The leadership team also reports conflicting information about their responsibilities and overarching role in the organization. For example, the team is unclear about which role has the responsibility to guide teachers through curriculum revisions. As a result, no one from the instructional leadership team or the teaching staff has ensured that the school's curriculum aligns to the state's standards.

- The assistant principals and manager of assessment and coaching visit classrooms frequently. The manager of assessment and coaching provides weekly observation and feedback to teachers who have been on the staff for fewer than three years. The assistant principals are responsible for coaching teachers who have been at the school for longer than that. External math and ELA coaches provide support over a three-week cycle for teachers implementing cognitively guided instruction, the school's new approach to teaching mathematics, and for general mathematics and ELA instruction. The assistant principals debrief with the external coaches after each visit in order to norm expectations for instruction. Notwithstanding frequent communication, procedures for setting goals and monitoring teachers' progress towards attaining them are not normed across all coaches resulting in inconsistent expectations for teaching and learning.

- Teachers plan instruction during twice-weekly grade team meetings. Each grade team leader guides the team through preparing lesson and unit plans for the upcoming week using a standard unit review protocol in use throughout the school. After teachers deliver the unit, they complete a post-unit protocol intended to guide teachers through refinements to the curriculum; however, no one from the instructional leadership team monitors the revisions to ensure alignment across grade levels within the school and alignment to the state's standards.

- Teacher professional development generally consists of planning lessons together and talking through possible revisions to the lessons and units. Teachers also use professional development time after an assessment cycle to analyze the available data and prepare strategies for re-teaching and re-grouping students. It is not evident that professional development activities build teachers' instructional delivery skills. Rather teachers use this time to analyze information about the students and/or their assessment scores.

BENCHMARK CONCLUSIONS

At-Risk Students

Harlem Link addresses the educational needs of at-risk students.

- The school effectively identifies ELLs and provides teachers with professional development activities that equip them with knowledge of appropriate instructional strategies; however, Harlem Link's program has produced mixed results. English Now serves as the school's curriculum program, which classroom teachers deliver in small groups before and after school. Student performance on state ELA and mathematics tests as well as the NYSESLAT is mixed. ELLs posted stronger growth percentiles in both ELA and mathematics than other Harlem Link students, with ELA growth slightly stronger than the statewide median. Nonetheless, the percentage of ELLs reaching English proficiency or making progress on the NYSESLAT dropped to 22.2 in 2014-15 after a sharp rise to over 40 percent in 2013-14.

- Harlem Link supports the 32 enrolled students with disabilities in integrated co-teaching ("ICT") classrooms at each grade level. Co-teachers plan and implement differentiated lessons and monitor students' progress toward meeting grade level and Individualized Education Program ("IEP") goals. Specialists receive little leadership support related to meeting students' academic needs since the departure of an assistant principal in January but continue to meet about behavioral issues bi-weekly with the lower grades social worker who now serves as the special education coordinator.

- Harlem Link uses a clear four-tiered approach to identify and serve students struggling academically. Classroom teachers implement whole class interventions at Tier I and provide direct instruction for individual students or small groups at Tier II. At Tier III, two academic intervention services ("AIS") teachers support 2nd-5th grade students with push-in and pullout instruction in collaboration with classroom teachers. AIS and classroom teachers monitor students' progress toward goals in bi-weekly meetings and refer students not making adequate progress for more intensive intervention. At Tier IV, the school increases the frequency of support from an AIS teacher and makes referral for special education evaluation as necessary. Harlem Link targets students performing at least one grade level below expected on the DRA for ELA intervention, but the school does not define Tier IV entry criteria for mathematics support.

Organizational Capacity

The school organization continually adapts to the perceived needs of its students. During this charter term, the school has struggled to meet or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.

- The school has operational policies and procedures that support the implementation of its educational program. Harlem Link clearly defines administrative roles and responsibilities

on paper but not in practice. The school continues to struggle to meet or come close to meeting its Accountability Plan goals and has not improved student achievement during the current charter term.

- This year, the school transitioned to the use of Responsive Classroom for student discipline and to establish positive culture. Responsive Classroom requires students to understand the nature of and consequence for their infraction; some students are required to complete a project that conveys information about why engaging in a particular behavior is disruptive to learning. Teachers' implementation of the system is inconsistent across classrooms with similar infractions incurring differing consequences. Some low level infractions do not incur any consequence at all.

- This year, 25 of 31 eligible teachers returned to the school. The board is thoughtful about its policies and receives input from teachers and school staff before adopting or changing them. This year, after teachers' input, the board implemented a paid maternity, paternity, and adoption leave policy designed to increase staff retention. Harlem Link also promotes teachers from within the school to leadership positions, further incentivizing teacher retention.

- The school monitors its programs and its overall results. The board and school leaders implement changes in response to perceived weaknesses. Changes to the school's curriculum and discipline system during the charter term addressed short-term problems but brought the school far afield from its original mission and vision. This year in response, the school implemented Responsive Classroom to change the school's discipline culture and, as a result, suspensions declined. Also this year, the school is utilizing more precise data analysis and as a result seeing improvements in teaching and learning in some of its classrooms.

Appendix A
School Overview

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Mission Statement

Harlem Link Charter School, a K-5 public school, links academics, values and community to graduate articulate scholars who will meet or exceed New York State Performance Standards and active citizens who learn and serve in their communities. Families, staff and community join together to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that empowers students to take an active role in their learning and demonstrate good character.

Board of Trustees[6]

Board Member Name	Position	Board Member Name	Position
Jonathan Barrett	Chair	David Brown	Secretary
Sean Coar	Treasurer	Kenneth Catandella	Trustee
Brandilyn Dumas	Trustee	Orton Ndau	Trustee
Rachel Field	Trustee	Krista Barron	Trustee
Bianna Cardinale	Trustee	B. Peter Curry	Trustee

School Characteristics

School Year	Chartered Enrollment	Actual Enrollment[7]	Proposed Grades	Actual Grades
2005-06	108	101	K-1	K-1
2006-07	162	162	K-2	K-2
2007-08	216	195	K-3	K-3
2008-09	270	262	K-4	K-4
2009-10	324	300	K-5	K-5
2010-11	320	295	K-5	K-5
2011-12	320	300	K-5	K-5
2012-13	320	300	K-5	K-5
2013-14	315	310	K-5	K-5
2014-15	315	304	K-5	K-5
2015-16	386	329	K-5	K-5

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[6] Source: The Institute's board records at the time of the visit.
[7] Source: Institute's Official Enrollment Binder. (Figures may differ slightly from New York State Report Cards, depending on date of data collection.)

Key Design Elements
▪ Rigorous, high expectations and a belief in all students;
▪ Data driven instruction;
▪ High levels of professional development;
▪ Consistent professional development for all teachers and staff;
▪ Family and community involvement; and,
▪ A supportive school culture.

Student Demographics: Race/Ethnicity

2014-15
- CSD 3: 30.9 | 34.5 | 23.4 | 8.0
- School: 33.6 | 63.1

2013-14
- CSD 3: 29.6 | 34.9 | 24.8 | 7.7
- School: 29.4 | 66.1 | 2.2

2012-13
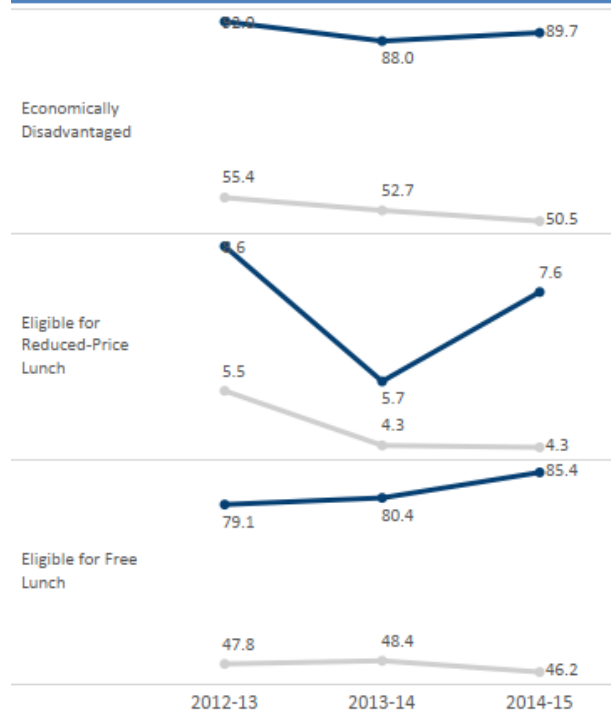- CSD 3: 29.1 | 34.8 | 26.1 | 7.8
- School: 25.6 | 68.8 | 3.3

Race/Ethnicity Color Legend

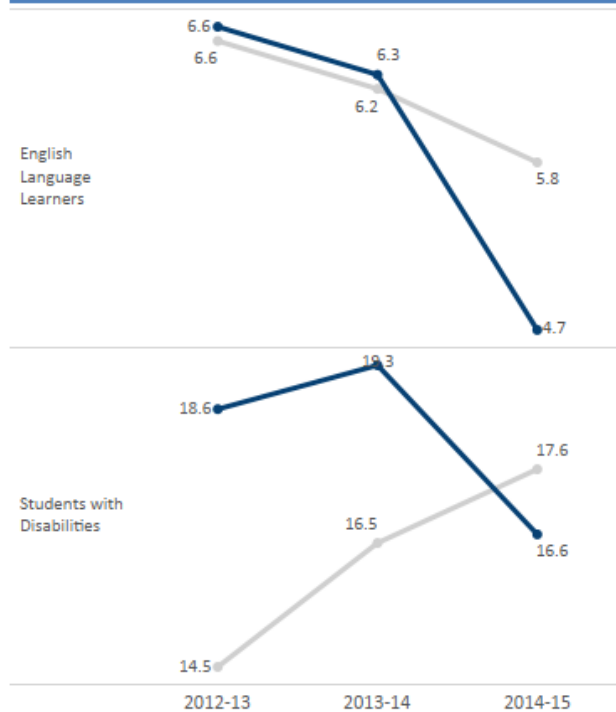American Indian or ..   Asian, Native Hawaii..   Black or African Ame..   Hispanic   Multiracial   White

Student Demographics: Free/Reduced Lunch

Economically Disadvantaged

School: 88.0, 89.7
District: 55.4, 52.7, 50.5

Eligible for Reduced-Price Lunch

School: .6, 5.7, 7.6
District: 5.5, 4.3, 4.3

Eligible for Free Lunch

School: 79.1, 80.4, 85.4
District: 47.8, 48.4, 46.2

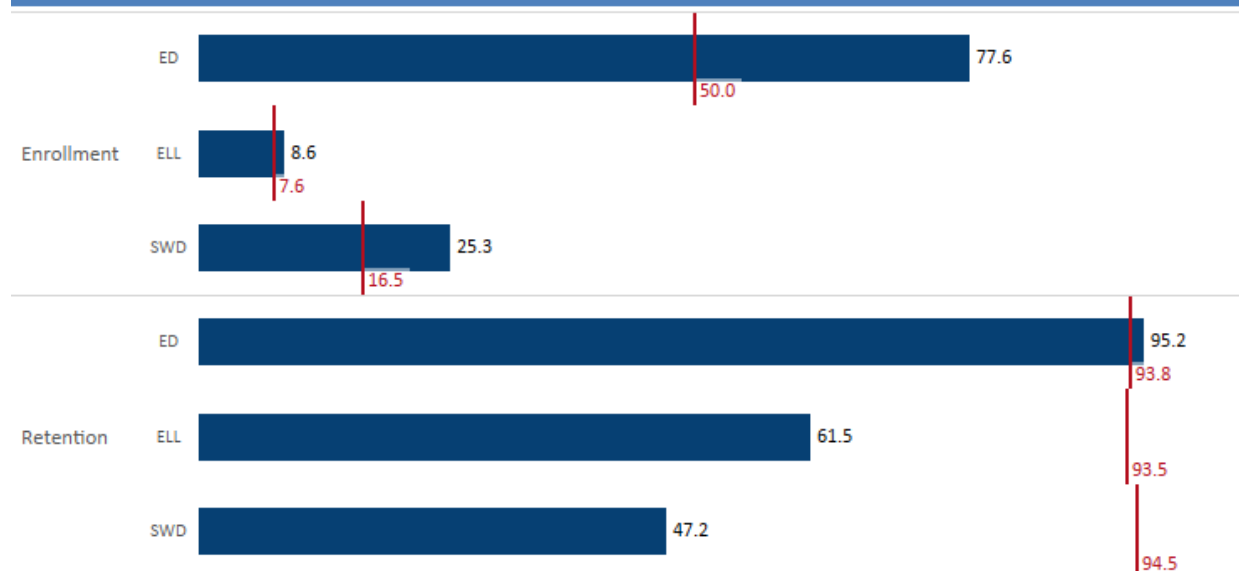|	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15

The charts show the trends in enrollment in the **school** and the district for each subgroup over the charter term. Reduced-Price and Free Lunch data are not available for 2014-15. Economically disadvantaged includes those students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price lunch among other qualifying income assistance programs.

Student Demographics: Special Populations

English Language Learners

School: 6.6, 6.3, 4.7
District: 6.6, 6.2, 5.8

Students with Disabilities

School: 18.6, 19.3, 16.6
District: 14.5, 16.5, 17.6

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15

The charts show trends in enrollment in the **school** and the district for each subgroup over the charter term.

Enrollment and Retention Targets

Enrollment

ED: 77.6 (target 50.0)
ELL: 8.6 (target 7.6)
SWD: 25.3 (target 16.5)

Retention

ED: 95.2 (target 93.8)
ELL: 61.5 (target 93.5)
SWD: 47.2 (target 94.5)

The chart illustrates the school's **current enrollment and retention percentages** against the **enrollment and retention targets**. As required by Education Law § 2851(4)(e), a school must include in its renewal application information regarding the efforts it has, and will, put in place to meet or exceed SUNY's enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, ELL, and FRPL students. This analysis is based on the most recently available data provided by the school.

Persistence in Enrollment

| Year	Value
2015-16	89.7
2014-15	84.5
2013-14	84.4

Persistence in enrollment illustrates the percentage of students not scheduled to age out of the school who re-enroll from the previous year. The Institute derived the statistical information on enrollment persistence from its database. No comparative data from NYCDOE or NYSED is available to the Institute to provide either district wide or by CSD context. As such, the information presented is for information purposes but does not allow for comparative analysis.

School Discipline

Suspensions: Harlem Link Charter School's in **school suspension rate** and **out of school suspension rate** and the district overall suspension rate.

Serving grades K-5

	2014	2015	2016
out of school	18.4	5.0	2.9
district	4.1	3.7	
in school	0.0	0.0	0.3
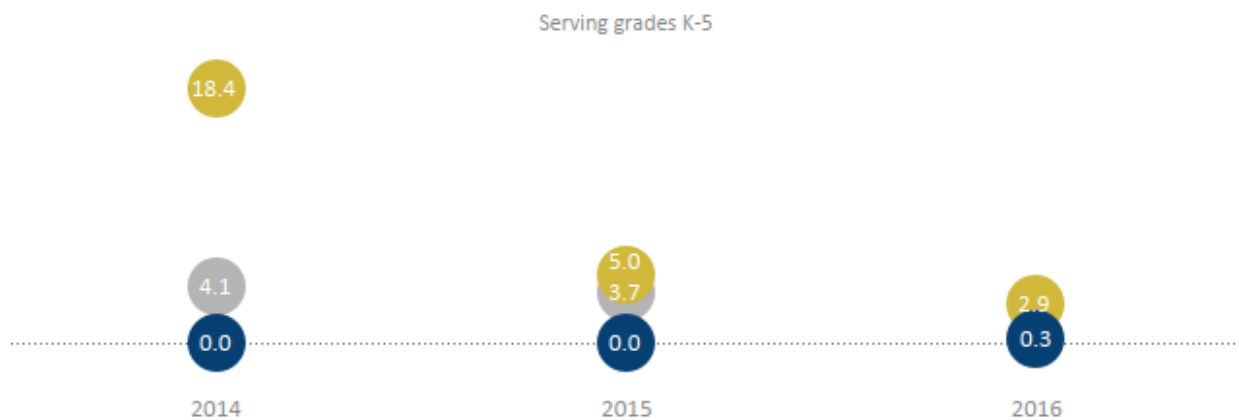
Although Community School District ("CSD") and school suspension rates are presented on the same graph, a direct comparison between the rates is not possible for three primary reasons. Available CSD data includes Kindergarten through 12th grades and school data includes only the grades served by the school. CSD data are not available that show multiple instances of suspension of a single student, the overall number of suspensions, the durations of suspensions, or the time of year when the school administered the suspension. CSD data showing the difference between in school and out of school suspensions are not available. The percentage rate shown here is calculated using the method employed by the New York City Department of Education: the total the number of students receiving an in school or out of school suspension at any time during the school year is divided by the total enrollment, then multiplied by 100.

Expulsions: The number of students expelled from the school each year.

2014	2015	2016
1	0	0

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

School Leaders

School Year(s)	Name(s) and Title(s)
2005-06 to 2009-10	Steven Evangelista, Co-Director of Operations Margaret Ryan, Co-Director for Instruction
2009-10 to Present	Steven Evangelista, Principal

School Visit History

School Year	Visit Type	Date(s)
2005-06	First Year	March 15, 2006
2006-07	Evaluation	March 13, 2007
2007-08	Evaluation	April 16-17, 2008
2008-09	Evaluation	March 24, 2009
2009-10	Initial Renewal	October 27-29, 2009
2010-11	Evaluation	March 1-2, 2011
2011-12	Evaluation	January 17-19, 2012
2012-13	Subsequent Renewal	November 7-8, 2012
2015-16	Evaluation	June 7, 2016

Conduct of the Visit

Date(s) of Visit	Evaluation Team Member	Title
June 7, 2016	Natasha M. Howard, PhD	Managing Director of Program
	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

Charter Cycle Context	
Charter Term	3rd Year of Five-Year Charter Term
Accountability Period[8]	4th Year of Five-Year Accountability Period
Anticipated Renewal Visit	Fall 2017

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[8] Because the SUNY Trustees make a renewal decision in the last year of a charter term, the Accountability Period ends in the next to last year of that charter term. For schools in initial charter terms, the Accountability Period is the first four years that the school provides instruction. For schools in subsequent charter terms, the Accountability Period includes the last year of the previous charter term through the next to last year of the current charter term.

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Appendix B

SUNY Renewal Benchmarks

State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks
Version 5.0, May 2012

Introduction

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks[1] (the "SUNY Renewal Benchmarks") serve two primary functions at renewal:

- They provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute (the "Institute") to gather and evaluate evidence to determine whether a school has made an adequate case for renewal. In turn, this evidence assists the Institute in deciding if it can make the required legal and other findings in order to reach a positive recommendation for renewal. For example, the various benchmarks that the Institute uses to determine whether the school has had fiscally responsible practices in place during the last charter period allow the Institute to determine with greater precision whether the school will operate in a fiscally sound manner during the next charter period, a finding that the New York Charter Schools Act requires the SUNY Trustees to make.

- At the same time that the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks provide a framework for the Institute to collect and review evidence, they also provide the school with a guide to understanding the Institute's evaluative criteria. As the Institute uses the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks (or some sub-set of them) as the framework for conducting its ongoing school evaluation visits, school leaders should be fully aware of the content of the Benchmarks at the time of renewal.

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are organized into four inter-connected renewal questions that each school must answer when submitting a renewal application. The benchmarks further reflect the interwoven nature of schools from an academic, organizational, fiscal and/or legal perspective. For example, the Institute could reasonably place many of the academic benchmarks under the heading of organizational effectiveness. More generally, some redundancy exists because the Institute looks at the same issue from different perspectives.

Precisely how the Institute uses the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, during both the renewal process and throughout the charter period, is explained in greater detail in the *Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University of New York* (the "SUNY Renewal Practices"), available on the Institute's website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/ schoolsRenewOverview.htm. Responses to frequently asked questions about the Institute's use of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks appear below:

[1] Research on public school reform, known as the effective schools movement, has embraced the premise that, given certain organizing and cultural characteristics, schools can teach all children the intended curriculum and hold them to high academic standards. Over the decades, the accumulated research into effective schools has yielded a set of common characteristics that all effective schools share. These characteristics are so consistently prevalent among successful schools that they have come to be known as the *Correlates of Effective Schools*. The Renewal Benchmarks adapt and elaborate on these correlates.

- The Institute does not have a point system for recommending renewal. A school cannot simply tally up the number of positive benchmark statements in order to determine the Institute's recommendation.

  - Some benchmarks are weighed more heavily than others. In particular, the Institute gives the greatest weight to how well the school has met its academic Accountability Plan goals.

  - Despite the fact that the Accountability Plan comprises only a single benchmark, a school's performance on that benchmark is critical. In fact, it is so important that while the Institute may recommend non-renewal for fiscal and organizational failures (if sufficiently serious), excellence in these areas will not excuse poor academic performance.

- The Institute does not use every benchmark during every kind of renewal review, and how the benchmarks are used differs depending on a school's circumstances. For example, the Qualitative Education Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1B-1F, 2C and 2D) are given far less weight in making a renewal decision on schools that the Institute has previously renewed. Similarly, less weight is accorded to these benchmarks during an initial renewal review where a school has consistently met its academic Accountability Plan goals.

- The Institute also may not consider every indicator subsumed under a benchmark when determining if a school has met that benchmark, given the school's stage of development or its previous track record.

- Aside from Benchmark 1A on academic Accountability Plan goals (which is singular in its importance), no school should fear that a failure to meet every element of every benchmark means that it is not in a position to make a case for renewal. To the contrary, the Institute has yet to see a school that performs perfectly in every respect. The Institute appreciates that the benchmarks set a very high standard collectively. While the Institute certainly hopes and expects that schools aim high, it is understood that a school's reach will necessarily exceed its grasp in at least some aspects.

In this fifth edition of the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, the Institute has made some revisions to the Qualitative Educational Benchmarks, namely those benchmarks used for ongoing school evaluation visits, to streamline the collection of evidence. For example, the Institute has incorporated Student Order and Discipline into Pedagogy, and Professional Development into Instructional Leadership. The Institute has rewritten some of the overarching benchmark statements to capture the most salient aspects of school effectiveness, organizational viability, legal compliance, and fiscal soundness. Some of the bulleted indicators within benchmarks have been recast or eliminated. Finally, the Institute has added some indicators to align the benchmarks with changes in the Charter Schools Act (e.g., provisions in meeting enrollment and retention targets when assigned and abiding by the General Municipal Law).

It is important that the entire school community understand the renewal process. All members of a school's leadership team and board should carefully review both the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks and the SUNY Renewal Practices. Note that a renewal overview document for parents, teachers and community members is also available on the Institute's website at: www.newyorkcharters.org/ schoolsRenewOverview.htm. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any questions.

State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1A **Academic Accountability Plan Goals**	**Over the Accountability Period, the school has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.** The Institute determines the extent to which the school has met the Accountability Plan goals in the following areas: • English language arts; • mathematics; • science; • social studies (high school only); • NCLB; • high school graduation and college preparation (if applicable); and • optional academic goals included by the school.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1B **Use of Assessment Data**	**The school has an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning.** The following elements are generally present: • the school regularly administers valid and reliable assessments aligned to the school's curriculum and state performance standards; • the school has a valid and reliable process for scoring and analyzing assessments; • the school makes assessment data accessible to teachers, school leaders and board members; • teachers use assessment results to meet students' needs by adjusting classroom instruction, grouping students and/or identifying students for special intervention; • school leaders use assessment results to evaluate teacher effectiveness and to develop professional development and coaching strategies; and • the school regularly communicates to parents/guardians about their students' progress and growth.

	Renewal Question 1 **Is the School an Academic Success?**
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C **Curriculum**	**The school's curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning.** The following elements are generally present: • the school has a curriculum framework with student performance expectations that provides a fixed, underlying structure, aligned to state standards and across grades; • in addition to the framework, the school has supporting tools (i.e., curriculum maps or scope and sequence documents) that provide a bridge between the curriculum framework and lesson plans; • teachers know what to teach and when to teach it based on these documents; • the school has a process for selecting, developing and reviewing its curriculum documents and its resources for delivering the curriculum; and • teachers plan purposeful and focused lessons.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1D **Pedagogy**	**High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.** The following elements are generally present. • teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum; • teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding; • teachers 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; • teachers maximize learning time (e.g., appropriate pacing, on-task student behavior, clear lesson focus and clear directions to students); transitions are efficient; and • teachers have effective classroom management techniques and routines that create a consistent focus on academic achievement.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1E **Instructional Leadership**	**The school has strong instructional leadership.** The following elements are generally present: • the school's leadership establishes an environment of high expectations for teacher performance (in content knowledge and

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	pedagogical skills) and in which teachers believe that all students can succeed; - the instructional leadership is adequate to support the development of the teaching staff; - instructional leaders provide sustained, systemic and effective coaching and supervision that improves teachers' instructional effectiveness; - instructional leaders provide opportunities and guidance for teachers to plan curriculum and instruction within and across grade levels; - instructional leaders implement a comprehensive professional development program that develops the competencies and skills of all teachers; - professional development activities are interrelated with classroom practice; - instructional leaders regularly conduct teacher evaluations with clear criteria that accurately identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses; and - instructional leaders hold teachers accountable for quality instruction and student achievement.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F **At-Risk Students**	**The school meets the educational needs of at-risk students.** The following elements are generally present: - the school uses clear procedures for identifying at-risk students including students with disabilities, English language learners and those struggling academically; - the school has adequate intervention programs to meet the needs of at-risk students; - general education teachers, as well as specialists, utilize effective strategies to support students within the general education program; - the school adequately monitors the progress and success of at-risk students; - teachers are aware of their students' progress toward meeting IEP goals, achieving English proficiency or school-based goals for struggling students;

	Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	• the school provides adequate training and professional development to identify at-risk students and to help teachers meet students' needs; and • the school provides opportunities for coordination between classroom teachers and at-risk program staff including the school nurse, if applicable.

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2A **Mission & Key Design Elements**	**The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.** The following elements are generally present: • the school faithfully follows its mission; and • the school has implemented its key design elements.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2B **Parents & Students**	**Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.** The following elements are generally present: • the school regularly communicates each child's academic performance results to families; • families are satisfied with the school; and • parents keep their children enrolled year-to-year.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2C **Organizational Capacity**	**The school organization effectively supports the delivery of the educational program.** The following elements are generally present: • the school has established an administrative structure with staff, operational systems, policies and procedures that allow the school to carry out its academic program; • the organizational structure establishes distinct lines of accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities; • the school has a clear student discipline system in place at the administrative level that is consistently applied; • the school retains quality staff; • the school has allocated sufficient resources to support the achievement of goals; • the school maintains adequate student enrollment; • the school has procedures in place to monitor its progress toward meeting enrollment and retention targets for special education students, ELLs and students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch, and adjusts its recruitment efforts accordingly; and • the school regularly monitors and evaluates the school's programs and makes changes if necessary.

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2D **Board Oversight**	**The school board works effectively to achieve the school's Accountability Plan goals.** The following elements are generally present: • board members possess adequate skills and have put in place structures and procedures with which to govern the school and oversee management of day-to-day operations in order to ensure the school's future as an academically successful, financially healthy and legally compliant organization; • the board requests and receives sufficient information to provide rigorous oversight of the school's program and finances; • it establishes clear priorities, objectives and long-range goals, (including Accountability Plan, fiscal, facilities and fundraising), and has in place benchmarks for tracking progress as well as a process for their regular review and revision; • the board successfully recruits, hires and retains key personnel, and provides them with sufficient resources to function effectively; • the board regularly evaluates its own performance and that of the school leaders and the management company (if applicable), holding them accountable for student achievement; and • the board effectively communicates with the school community including school leadership, staff, parents/guardians and students.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2E **Governance**	**The board implements, maintains and abides by appropriate policies, systems and processes.** The following elements are generally present: • the board effectively communicates with its partner or management organizations as well as key contractors such as back-office service providers and ensures that it receives value in exchange for contracts and relationships it enters into and effectively monitors such relationships; • the board takes effective action when there are organizational, leadership, management, facilities or fiscal deficiencies; or where the management or partner organization fails to meet

	Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	expectations; to correct those deficiencies and puts in place benchmarks for determining if the partner organization corrects them in a timely fashion; • the board regularly reviews and updates board and school policies as needed and has in place an orientation process for new members; • the board effectively recruits and selects new members in order to maintain adequate skill sets and expertise for effective governance and structural continuity; • the board implements a comprehensive and strict conflict of interest policy (and/or code of ethics)—consistent with that set forth in the charter and with the General Municipal Law—and consistently abides by them throughout the term of the charter; • the board generally avoids conflicts of interest; where not possible, the board manages those conflicts in a clear and transparent manner; • the board implements a process for dealing with complaints consistent with that set forth in the charter, makes the complaint policy clear to all stakeholders, and follows the policy including acting on complaints in a timely fashion; • the board abides by its by-laws including, but not limited to, provisions regarding trustee election and the removal and filling of vacancies; and • the board holds all meetings in accordance with the Open Meetings Law and records minutes for all meetings including executive sessions and, as appropriate, committee meetings.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2F **Legal Requirements**	**The school substantially complies with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.** The following elements are generally present: • the school compiles a record of substantial compliance with the terms of its charter and applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations including, but not limited to, submitting items to the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL and Open Meetings Law;

	Renewal Question 2 **Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization?**
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	• the school substantially complies with the terms of its charter and applicable laws, rules and regulations; • the school abides by the terms of its monitoring plan; • the school implements effective systems and controls to ensure that it meets legal and charter requirements; • the school has an active and ongoing relationship with in-house or independent legal counsel who reviews and makes recommendations on relevant policies, documents, transactions and incidents and who also handles other legal matters as needed; and • the school manages any litigation appropriately and provides litigation papers to insurers and the Institute in a timely manner.

	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3A **Budgeting and Long Range Planning**	**The school operates pursuant to a long-range financial plan in which it creates realistic budgets that it monitors and adjusts when appropriate.** The following elements are generally present: • the school has clear budgetary objectives and budget preparation procedures; • board members, school management and staff contribute to the budget process, as appropriate; • the school frequently compares its long-range fiscal plan to actual progress and adjusts it to meet changing conditions; • the school routinely analyzes budget variances; the board addresses material variances and makes necessary revisions; and • actual expenses are equal to, or less than, actual revenue with no material exceptions.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3B **Internal Controls**	**The school maintains appropriate internal controls and procedures.** The following elements are generally present: • the school follows a set of comprehensive written fiscal policies and procedures; • the school accurately records and appropriately documents transactions in accordance with management's direction, laws, regulations, grants and contracts; • the school safeguards its assets; • the school identifies/analyzes risks and takes mitigating actions; • the school has controls in place to ensure that management decisions are properly carried out and monitors and assesses controls to ensure their adequacy; • the school's trustees and employees adhere to a code of ethics; • the school ensures duties are appropriately segregated, or institutes compensating controls; • the school ensures that employees performing financial functions are appropriately qualified and adequately trained; • the school has systems in place to provide the appropriate information needed by staff and the board to make sound financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements;

	Renewal Question 3 **Is the School Fiscally Sound?**
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	• a staff member of the school reviews grant agreements and restrictive gifts and monitors compliance with all stated conditions; • the school prepares payroll according to appropriate state and federal regulations and school policy; • the school ensures that employees, trustees and volunteers who handle cash and investments are bonded to help assure the safeguarding of assets; and • the school takes corrective action in a timely manner to address any internal control or compliance deficiencies identified by its external auditor, the Institute, and/or the State Education Department or the Comptroller, if needed.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3C **Financial Reporting**	**The school has complied with financial reporting requirements by providing the SUNY Trustees and the State Education Department with required financial reports that are on time, complete and follow generally accepted accounting principles.** The following reports have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner: • annual financial statement audit reports including federal Single Audit report, if applicable; • annual budgets and cash flow statements; • un-audited quarterly reports of income, expenses, and enrollment; • bi-monthly enrollment reports to the district and, if applicable, to the State Education Department including proper documentation regarding the level of special education services provided to students; and • grant expenditure reports.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3D **Financial Condition**	**The school maintains adequate financial resources to ensure stable operations. Critical financial needs of the school are not dependent on variable income (grants, donations and fundraising).** The following elements are generally present: • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly;

	Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
	• the school maintains adequate liquid reserves to fund expenses in the event of income loss (generally three months); • the school prepares and monitors cash flow projections; • If the school includes philanthropy in its budget, it monitors progress toward its development goals on a periodic basis; • If necessary, the school pursues district state aid intercepts with the state education department to ensure adequate per pupil funding; and • the school accumulates unrestricted net assets that are equal to or exceed two percent of the school's operating budget for the upcoming year.

	Renewal Question 4 **If the School's Charter is Renewed, What are its Plans** **for the Term of the Next Charter Period, and are they** **Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?**
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4A **Plans for the School's Structure**	**Key structural elements of the school, as defined in the exhibits of the Application for Charter Renewal, are reasonable, feasible and achievable.** Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal: • the school is likely to fulfill its mission in the next charter period; • the school has an enrollment plan that can support the school program; • the school calendar and daily schedules clearly provide sufficient instructional time to meet all legal requirements, allow the school to meet its proposed Accountability Plan goals and abide by its proposed budget; • key design elements are consistent with the mission statement and are feasible given the school's budget and staffing; • a curriculum framework for added grades aligns with the state's performance standards; and • plans in the other required Exhibits indicate that the school's structure is likely to support the educational program.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4B **Plans for the Educational Program**	**The school's plans for implementing the educational program allow it to meet its Accountability Plan goals.** Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal: • for those grades served during the last charter period, the school has plans for sustaining and (where possible) improving upon the student outcomes it has compiled during the last charter period including any adjustments or additions to the school's educational program; • for a school that is seeking to add grades, the school is likely to meet its Accountability Plan goals and the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks at the new grade levels; and • where the school will provide secondary school instruction, it has presented a set of requirements for graduation that students are likely to meet and that are consistent with the graduation standards set by the Board of Regents.

	Renewal Question 4 If the School's Charter is Renewed, What are its Plans for the Term of the Next Charter Period, and are they Reasonable, Feasible and Achievable?
Evidence Category	**SUNY Renewal Benchmarks**
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4C **Plans for Board Oversight and Governance**	**The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable plan for board oversight and governance.** Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal: • school trustees are likely to possess a range of experience, skills, and abilities sufficient to oversee the academic, organizational and fiscal performance of the school; • plans by the school board to orient new trustees to their roles and responsibilities, and, if appropriate, to participate in ongoing board training are likely to sustain the board's ability to carry out its responsibilities; • if the school plans to change an association with a partner or management organization in the term of a future charter, it has provided a clear rationale for the disassociation and an outline indicating how it will manage the functions previously associated with that partnering organization; and • if the school is either moving from self-management to a management structure or vice-versa, or is changing its charter management organization/educational service provider, its plans indicate that it will be managed in an effective, sound and viable manner including appropriate oversight of the academic and fiscal performance of the school or the management organization.

SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4D **Fiscal & Facility Plans**	**The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable fiscal plan including plans for an adequate facility.** Based on the elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal: - the school's budgets adequately support staffing, enrollment and facility projections; - fiscal plans are based on the sound use of financial resources to support academic program needs; - fiscal plans are clear, accurate, complete and based on reasonable assumptions; - information on enrollment demand provides clear evidence for the reasonableness of projected enrollment; and - facility plans are likely to meet educational program needs.