



Charter Schools Institute
The State University of **New York**

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July 29, 2013

VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Kevin Genirs, Board Chair
Beginning with Children Charter School 2
215 Heyward Street
Brooklyn, NY 11206

Re: First Year School Evaluation Visit

Dear Mr. Genirs:

This letter outlines the State University of New York's Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its April 4, 2013 first year school evaluation visit to the Beginning with Children Charter School 2 ("BWC 2"). The visit team consisted of Natasha Howard, Ph.D., Director of School Evaluation, and Eileen Coppola, Ed.D., consultant to the Institute. Allow us first to place this letter and the conclusions set forth below into context.

As with all SUNY authorized charter schools, on a periodic basis throughout the term of your 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 letters 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 SUNY Board of Trustees an analysis of your school's performance over the term of its charter that includes this qualitative information. The Institute makes a renewal recommendation for your school based on two components: the school's attainment of its academic 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 SUNY Charter Renewal Benchmarks (see attachment). For formal school evaluation visits conducted prior to renewal, the Institute focuses on specific academic and organizational benchmarks (called Qualitative Educational Benchmarks). They provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

For this first year visit, the Institute narrows the expectation for each benchmark in recognition of the school program's limited development. As a first year school is in its formative stage and has not yet completed an annual cycle, the visit focus is on the initial implementation of basic practices and procedures in each benchmark area. The center of attention is on the quality of

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instruction and related benchmarks, which heavily affect the progress that a school is able to demonstrate in meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter period. By the time a school comes to renewal, a school is expected to have moved from the beginning of implementation and the promise of future growth to full and effective implementation of a quality program.

Although the information provided in this letter is not intended as a prescription, the Institute would expect you to review thoroughly the issues highlighted below and, to the extent you find them helpful, use them to assist in guiding the school's leadership team to further develop 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, we are cognizant of the fact that a one-day site visit may not yield information on all facets of a school's program.

Please find the team's findings from the first year visit below.

Use of Assessment Data

BWC 2 gathers assessment and evaluation data and uses it to adjust instruction.

- The school regularly administers standardized assessments in literacy and mathematics. Four times per year, BWC 2 administers the Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress ("STEP") literacy assessment; the school administers the AIMSweb math assessments three times per year. BWC 2 also administers the Terra Nova in the spring. The school uses unit tests from commercial curriculum products, often adding additional questions or adapting language in the standard questions.
- BWC 2 distributes report cards four times per year. The report cards provide a Level 1-4 score for multiple skills grouped by subject area. First grade report cards also include students' STEP levels. Teachers at both grade levels provide detailed comments about students' progress, which they report in families' home language. The school also holds parent-teacher conferences three times per year.
- Teachers report using assessment data to regroup students, to determine the need for re-teaching and to identify students for intervention services.
- Although the school maintains detailed assessment information by grade and class, there is little evidence that the instructional leadership holds teachers accountable for student achievement given that wide variance in assessment results from one class to another has not prompted formal improvement plans.

Curriculum

BWC 2 has a curriculum that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction in most subjects.

- The school has scope and sequence documents and a pacing guide for each subject area in each grade level. The school uses the commercial curriculum Journeys in English language arts and Math in Focus to guide math instruction. In science, social studies, music and art, teachers continue to extend curricula initially developed over the summer.
- Accessing curriculum documents through Google Docs, teachers know what to teach and when to teach it.
- Teachers have access to ample instructional materials. Leveled readers, trade books, online literacy support and other materials are abundant in classrooms. In addition, the school has well-equipped art and music rooms.
- Teachers report using the Writing Workshop curriculum. However, the student writing products viewed during the evaluation visit suggest that current writing instruction is not yet adequate to prepare students to meet performance expectations for Common Core state standards.

Pedagogy

Adequate instruction is evident in most BWC 2 classrooms.

- Teachers conduct focused and purposeful lessons, which are generally clear and rigorous. Teachers challenge students to analyze text through questions during read-alouds and in guided reading groups.
- With its co-teaching model, BWC 2 adeptly utilizes flexible, small group instruction to differentiate instruction for students. Grade level teams meet weekly to plan instruction; the school does not provide other formal opportunities for teachers to confer and co-plan with one another.
- Teachers lead efficient transitions within and between classrooms. Teachers maximize learning time and use consistent routines to maintain a clear focus on instruction.
- Most students engage in classroom work throughout the school day and clearly understand what teachers expect of them.
- Teachers effectively and efficiently correct low-level misbehavior through visual and verbal cues. BWC 2 teachers also take proactive steps, such as short exercise-breaks, to redirect students' attention and maintain academic focus.

Instructional Leadership

At the time of the visit, BWC 2 was in the process of developing its instructional leadership system and did not yet have the capacity to support the development of all staff.

- The school has established a culture of learning and scholarship. In addition to naming all classrooms after a college or university, teachers regularly incorporate conversations about

building successful futures into academic lessons. For example, 1st grade students recently discussed the differences between jobs and careers.

- The school has not yet developed an internal system of sustained and systematic coaching to meet the needs of all teachers. While the principal frequently conducts informal classroom observations, he does not consistently provide feedback to teachers on areas in need of improvement. The principal reports observing, coaching and modeling lessons more frequently for teachers whom he has determined need more intensive support based on assessment results. The effectiveness of these interventions is not yet evident. Curriculum consultants also observe classes regularly and provide strategies for improving instruction in specific subject areas; teachers describe their work with consultants as helpful.
- BWC 2 provides ongoing professional development to teachers; these activities are interrelated with classroom practice with topics including curriculum development, using technology and behavior management. BWC 2's principal uses classroom observations both to inform professional development plans and to follow up on these activities.
- During BWC 2's ten-day summer professional development, the school relayed expectations for using technology, managing behavior and planning for opening days; teachers also collaborated on curriculum planning. During monthly full-day professional development sessions, teachers address topics such as using assessment data to drive instruction and supporting at-risk students. In addition, several instructional team members attended an out-of-state training in Singapore Math prior to school opening and others participate in the New York City Charter Center's special education collaborative.
- At the time of the evaluation visit, the school principal had begun conducting formal evaluations based on clear criteria previously presented to teachers.

At Risk Students

At this time, BWC 2 sufficiently addresses the educational needs of English language learners ("ELLs") and students with identified disabilities. The school does not yet have systems and procedures in place to support other students at-risk of academic failure.

- BWC 2 identifies ELLs with the home language survey and LAB-R, as appropriate. Five kindergarten ELL students receive pull-out services during daily morning meetings from a part-time English as a Second Language ("ESL") teacher. A Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages ("TESOL") certified teacher supports the three currently enrolled 1st grade ELL students within the classroom.
- For core academic instruction, the school employs a co-teaching model in every classroom. One classroom per grade utilizes an integrated co-teaching ("ICT") model to provide special education services for the six BWC 2 students with disabilities who receive mandated academic intervention services. BWC 2 does not currently have a clear procedure for referring students for special education evaluation.
- The school identifies students who are academically at-risk during monthly Child Study Team ("CST") meetings; however, the CST does not adequately monitor student progress and adjust intervention plans based on assessment results. The mid-year loss of an

experienced special educator who had served as the at-risk coordinator creates a notable gap in the provision of these services.

Organizational Capacity

BWC 2 is in the process of building capacity to support the delivery of its educational program.

- Although it receives significant back office support from its partner organization, BWC 2 has not yet created a fully effective internal administrative structure with staff, operational systems and clear procedures that will be necessary to implement an effective academic program as the school grows. Currently, program implementation relies heavily on relationships rather than clear systems and procedures.
- At the start of the school year, a dean of students provided teachers with significant professional development and coaching support, particularly in the area of meeting the needs of at-risk students. Since the dean's departure, the principal has been the sole instructional leader and has not yet created systems to support all teachers.
- BWC 2's principal reports having deliberately hired experienced instructional staff. Seven of eight BWC 2 teachers have more than three years of prior teaching experience.
- Staff members uniformly describe the school environment as positive and deeply supportive. Students and teachers express enthusiasm for being at the school, and many staff members note the school's sense of community as a key element in their job satisfaction.
- BWC 2 has allocated ample resources, based on the principal's instructional program priorities, in support of achieving its goals.
- With its reliance on relationships rather than clear processes, BWC 2 has not yet created the systems and protocols necessary to ensure a well functioning school organization.

Board Oversight

The school board monitors student achievement and provides oversight to the total educational program.

- BWC 2 board members have experience in a wide variety of areas that inform their oversight of the school including education leadership, teacher recruitment, law, management and finance. The board does not have immediate plans to expand its membership.
- In addition to its executive committee, the board has established the following committees: academic excellence/principal review, finance, facilities, legal and fundraising.
- Board members regularly receive and review information regarding the school's progress. BWC 2's principal and/or a Beginning with Children Foundation representative present an analysis of a network-created data dashboard at each of the board's 11 annual meetings. The dashboard includes information on STEP and AIMSweb results, student attendance and the school's finances. Board members have closely monitored aggregate data for the school and student performance by grade; recently, after becoming aware of discrepancies between classrooms, the board now intends to review classroom-level data.

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- The BWC 2board has not yet finalized criteria for formally evaluating the principal; it is considering using a school leader evaluation tool created by its sister school, Community Partnership Charter School. The board's current informal evaluations of leader effectiveness include both quantitative and qualitative data. The board considers assessment results, enrollment, teacher retention and school climate information.

These conclusions constitute the beginning of your school's record of progress toward meeting the standards constituted in the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks. The Institute conducts formal evaluation visits multiple times during each school's initial charter term and at least once during subsequent charter terms. The cumulative evidence collected during these school evaluation and renewal visits, as well as the school's record of success at meeting Accountability Plan goals becomes part of the record that informs the Institute's renewal recommendation to the SUNY Trustees.

The number of school evaluation visits the Institute will conduct before renewal depends on a variety of factors. In addition to adhering to a regular schedule of visits, concerns raised in the conclusions of previous visits, the school's progress toward meeting Accountability Plan goals and emergent legal and compliance issues may affect the frequency and timing of the visits.

The Institute looks forward to its next visit to BWC 2 and is available at any time to discuss the results of the first year visit, future visits or other concerns you may have as the school moves through its charter term and toward renewal.

Sincerely,



Susan Miller Barker
Executive Director



Ron Miller, Ph.D.
Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

c: Esosa Ogbahon, Principal
Denniston Reid, Chief Academic Officer, Beginning with Children Foundation



State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks

Version 5.0, May 2012

Introduction

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks¹ (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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1A Academic Accountability Plan Goals	<p>Over the Accountability Period, the school has met or come close to meeting its academic Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The Institute determines the extent to which the school has met the Accountability Plan goals in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school has an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1C Curriculum	<p>The school's curriculum supports teachers in their instructional planning.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>High quality instruction is evident throughout the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<p>The school has strong instructional leadership.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<p>pedagogical skills) and in which teachers believe that all students can succeed;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>SUNY Renewal Benchmark 1F</p> <p>At-Risk Students</p>	<p>The school meets the educational needs of at-risk students.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2A Mission & Key Design Elements	<p>The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school faithfully follows its mission; and • the school has implemented its key design elements.
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2B Parents & Students	<p>Parents/guardians and students are satisfied with the school.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school organization effectively supports the delivery of the educational program.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 2D Board Oversight	<p>The school board works effectively to achieve the school's Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The board implements, maintains and abides by appropriate policies, systems and processes.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<p>expectations; to correct those deficiencies and puts in place benchmarks for determining if the partner organization corrects them in a timely fashion;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school substantially complies with applicable laws, rules and regulations and the provisions of its charter.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 3A Budgeting and Long Range Planning	<p>The school operates pursuant to a long-range financial plan in which it creates realistic budgets that it monitors and adjusts when appropriate.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school maintains appropriate internal controls and procedures.</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>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.</p> <p>The following reports have generally been filed in a timely, accurate and complete manner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>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).</p> <p>The following elements are generally present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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?
<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4A Plans for the School's Structure	<p>Key structural elements of the school, as defined in the exhibits of the Application for Charter Renewal, are reasonable, feasible and achievable.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school's plans for implementing the educational program allow it to meet its Accountability Plan goals.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

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<u>Evidence Category</u>	<u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u>
SUNY Renewal Benchmark 4C Plans for Board Oversight and Governance	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable plan for board oversight and governance.</p> <p>Based on elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>The school provides a reasonable, feasible and achievable fiscal plan including plans for an adequate facility.</p> <p>Based on the elements present in the Application for Charter Renewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.