



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

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June 4, 2013

VIA ELECTRONIC AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

Niki Simoneaux and Jamie Knox
Chairpersons of the Board
Heketi Community Charter School
423 E. 138th Street
Bronx, NY 10454

Re: First Year School Evaluation Visit

Dear Ms. Simoneaux and Mr. Knox:

This letter outlines the State University of New York's Charter Schools Institute's ("the Institute's") observations and findings from its April 25, 2013 first year school evaluation visit to the Heketi Community Charter School ("Heketi"). The visit team consisted of Danielle Keen, Senior Analyst at the Institute, and Eileen Copolla, 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 State University of New York's 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 Renewal Benchmarks (called Qualitative Educational Benchmarks). They provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the school progresses toward renewal.

To Learn
To Search
To Serve



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 which 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 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.

Instructional Leadership

Heketi is developing strong instructional leadership.

- The school employs capable instructional leaders who develop the teaching staff through systematic coaching and supervision. The school director conducts formal observations three times per year; two part-time instructional specialists join the school director to conduct weekly informal observations and more formal classroom walk-throughs, at least once per month. Instructional specialists meet with teachers twice weekly to provide feedback on observed lessons and to review curriculum planning documents.
- The school holds two hour professional development sessions every other week. These sessions focus on observed deficiencies in teachers' pedagogical skills, including curriculum development, lesson planning and data analysis. Instructional leaders also analyze student data to identify professional development topics for improving teacher skills.
- At the time of the visit, the school director had conducted two formal evaluations of each teacher with a third slated for late spring. The first evaluation was based on a rubric developed by the school director that reflected New York State teaching standards. According to the school leader, teachers found the rubric challenging to use, so she developed a condensed version for the second evaluation. Individually, both tools are well-developed and provide teachers with useful information regarding their instructional strengths and weaknesses; however, the mid-year change left teachers unclear about the criteria by which they are formally held accountable for quality instruction.
- In addition to the formal evaluations, the instructional leaders provide formal feedback based on classroom walk-throughs, holding teachers accountable for implementing skills

presented in the weekly professional development sessions.

Use of Assessment Data

Heketi gathers assessment data and uses it to improve student learning in English language arts ("ELA"); the school has not yet developed a system for analyzing assessment data in math.

- The school administers the Fountas and Pinnell assessment to measure reading level and growth, as well as Foundations to measure phonemic awareness, decoding skills and sight-word recognition. The school administers unit assessments from the Bridges math curriculum, as well as teacher-created assessments.
- The school director reports that on the school's most recent Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment, 53 percent of Kindergarten students were reading on-grade level. In first grade, 43 percent of students were reading on grade-level. Fifty-three percent of first graders entered the school reading on a pre-Kindergarten level; at the time of the visit, the school had reduced that number to 18 percent.
- The school director creates reports that detail student performance on the school, grade, classroom and individual level. After each benchmark assessment, the school staff collectively analyzes these reports and pinpoint what is working well, and what is not working across the school. In addition, instructional coaches analyze the data with teachers on the classroom and individual student level, in order to recalibrate student groupings, adjust instruction plans and identify specific interventions for students.
- While the school has created robust systems to analyze ELA data, teachers do not yet systematically analyze data from math assessments. The school director reports that this choice is strategic; the school's priority for year one is to bring students up to grade-level proficiency in reading; whereas, in year two, the focus will shift to math and a third instructional specialist for math will join the school's staff.
- The school sends home two progress reports and two report cards per year. Progress reports provide lengthy narratives on students' progress toward meeting learning objectives. During twice yearly parent conferences, teachers share work samples and examples of appropriate on-level books to encourage reading at home.

Curriculum

Heketi has a curriculum that supports teachers in their planning and delivery of instruction.

- The school has curriculum maps that include scope and sequence documents, as well as monthly pacing guides for each subject. Teachers work together to create unit plans and either create lesson plans on their own or collaborate within their grade-level team. Teachers plan lessons utilizing a school-wide template. The school director reviews lesson plans weekly and provides feedback in a timely manner, allowing teachers to adjust their plans prior to implementation.
- Teachers know what to teach and when based on these documents. With support from the instructional specialists, teachers work to create unit and lesson plans on an ongoing

basis in this first year. There are plans in place to revise units and lesson plans at the end of the year.

- Teachers have access to leveled readers, textbooks and other materials, though they report that they did not have access to these in the early months of the school year. There is a notable lack of technology throughout the school.

Pedagogy

Adequate instruction is evident throughout the school, with some instances of high quality instruction.

- With a few exceptions, teachers focus their lessons on learning objectives that specify clear expectations for what students must know and be able to do. Teachers define a clear progression of learning tasks focusing on clear outcomes.
- Teachers attempt to maximize learning time, keeping their students focused on learning and utilizing routines to effect efficient transitions between activities. Despite teacher re-direction, many students periodically shift their attention elsewhere, distracting other students with low-level misbehavior.
- Teachers have established daily classroom routines as part of a culture in which learning is valued. While there is a discipline system in place, teachers implement it inconsistently across classrooms.
- Teachers check for student understanding. Some of these practices are extremely effective, using Popsicle sticks to choose random students to demonstrate their work on the board, cold-calling and circulating to check student answers. Other practices are less robust, with some teachers only calling on students who raise their hands and circulating to make sure students are working rather than analyzing the quality of their work.
- Teachers, most with little previous classroom experience, are beginning to present rigorous lessons that push students to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- Writing samples suggest that Heketi is preparing students to attain grade-level standards. Students have the opportunity to write frequently, and a robust writing curriculum with clear assessment rubrics is in evidence.

At Risk Students

Heketi has appropriate procedures and staff to address the educational needs of at-risk students, though services lack coordination across the school.

- The instructional specialists and one first grade classroom teacher provide pull-out services for students in need of interventions and enrichment. The school's Spanish teacher, who is dual certified in early childhood bilingual education and special education, provides English-as-a-Second-Language ("ESL") services to the school's 15 English language learners ("ELLs"), as well as push-in and pull-out support to one student with an Individualized Education Program ("IEP") in the first grade. In Kindergarten, the school maintains one Integrated Co-Teaching classroom to serve its seven Kindergartners with IEPs. In addition, the school employs one staff member on an hourly basis to coordinate the special education program.

- Heketi uses the Fountas and Pinnell and phonemic awareness assessments to identify at-risk students. Using the results of these assessments, instructional specialists create leveled intervention and enrichment groups for the lowest and highest performing students. These groups are fluid with students moving between groups frequently. The school identifies students in need of special education referrals through a Response to Intervention (“RtI”) system. Teachers who observe students that fail to show improvement over time can refer them to the Instructional Support Team (“IST”) or Student Intervention Team (“SIT”), which deal with academic and behavioral challenges, respectively. The IST and SIT create intervention plans and goals for students, and review progress towards goals monthly or quarterly, depending on the specific goals. If interventions prove unsuccessful after two to three cycles, the team may work with parents to complete a referral for special education. The school administers the Home Language Survey and the Lab-R to identify ELLs.
- The school does not provide formal time or have systems for general education and at-risk service providers to coordinate their instruction. Given the large number of staff providing services to various groups of students, the informal cooperation does not ensure that teachers meet the needs of all students.

Organizational Capacity

Heketi’s organization supports the delivery of the developing educational program.

- The school has put in place an administrative structure with staff, operational systems and procedures that allow it to carry out the academic program. Heketi’s operations run efficiently, allowing the school director and teachers to focus on instruction.
- The school has established a safe and orderly environment. Classrooms and hallways are calm and well monitored.
- Teachers report that resources were lacking at the beginning of the school year, due to delays in purchasing. They also report that more technology in the classroom would improve their ability to implement the academic program; the school director notes that the lack of technology in the Kindergarten and first grade is purposeful and that subsequent grades will include a larger focus on technology. Each classroom has two desktop computers and the school has a shared set of iPads that teachers can check-out for use.
- Heketi has begun to create the systems and protocols necessary to ensure a well functioning school organization.

Board Oversight

The Heketi school board provides oversight to the total educational program.

- The board has an adequate skill set with expertise in finance, marketing, corporate law, development, communications, K-12 education and charter school operations. The board is seeking to recruit members with additional experience in finance and education, as well as real estate. The board functions generally as a committee of the whole.
- The board receives sufficient information from the school leader to provide oversight. At

each board meeting, the school director presents on the school's performance and provides the board with a dashboard that details relevant data points relating to student assessment data, discipline, enrollment and attrition. The school director also presents a separate month-to-month finance dashboard that details cash-on-hand and variances.

- The board conducted an evaluation of the school's leader midway through the year and plans to conduct a subsequent evaluation at the end of the school-year. The board developed the evaluation protocol and criteria, allowing the school director to provide feedback before the first implementation. The board has committed to using the protocol for one full year and then revising it as necessary before the school's second year of operation.

These conclusions constitute the beginning of your school's record of progress toward meeting the standards constituted in SUNY's 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 Heketi 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
Executive Deputy Director for Accountability

c: Cynthia Rosario, School Director



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

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.

-Revised May 2012-

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:

- 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 Education 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? |
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| <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. |

| | Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| 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. |
| 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. |

| | Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| 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 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; |

| | Renewal Question 1 Is the School an Academic Success? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <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; • 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? |
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| <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 |

| | Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | and makes changes if necessary. |
| 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; |

| | Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 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 | <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 |

| | Renewal Question 2 Is the School an Effective, Viable Organization? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | <p>the Institute in a timely manner, and meeting teacher certification (including NCLB highly qualified status) and background check requirements, FOIL and Open Meetings Law;</p> <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? |
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| <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 |

| | Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | <p>financial decisions and to fulfill compliance requirements;</p> <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> |

| | Renewal Question 3 Is the School Fiscally Sound? |
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| <u>Evidence Category</u> | <u>SUNY Renewal Benchmarks</u> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school maintains sufficient cash on hand to pay current bills and those that are due shortly; • 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? |
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| <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. |

| | 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? |
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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. |