

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT  
LITTLE WATER PREPARATORY  
CHARTER SCHOOL*

*VISIT DATE: APRIL 18, 2023*

*REPORT DATE: JUNE 9, 2023*

*SUNY Charter Schools Institute*

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

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# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the SUNY Charter Schools Institute's (the "Institute's") observations and findings from its April 18, 2023 first year school evaluation visit to Little Water Preparatory Charter School ("Little Water Prep").

## REPORT FORMAT

Throughout the charter term the Institute may conduct a number of formal evaluative visits including in the first year of operation. Each formal evaluative visit produces a written report based on data gathered during these visits. These reports form the foundation of qualitative data on the charter's effectiveness.

At the conclusion of the charter term, the Institute provides the State University of New York Board of Trustees (the "SUNY Trustees") a renewal recommendation based on its evaluation of the academic, organizational, legal, and fiscal aspects of the charter's program using the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks (see attachment), which incorporates the school's attainment of its Accountability Plan goals and evidence of the quality of the charter's educational program gathered in its formal evaluative visits. For first year evaluation visits, the Institute focuses on specific qualitative benchmarks that provide a fixed standard for determining the quality of the academic program as the charter progresses toward renewal.





## CHARTER BACKGROUND

# LITTLE WATER PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL

68 Dutchess Ave. | Grades: K - 1 | Poughkeepsie City School District

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for Little Water Prep on June 15, 2021. The charter opened in fall 2022.



### MISSION

*In partnership with the community, Little Water Prep provides an affirming and rigorous environment for all Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade scholars through reflective, data-driven teaching and a responsive curriculum that allows scholars to recognize their power and have agency over their futures.*

### CURRENT YEAR

Serves: Kindergarten – 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

Chartered Enrollment: 120

Charter Expiration:  
July 31, 2027

### ANTICIPATED 2026-27

Serving: Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade

Chartered Enrollment: 360

### KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

A conceptual, deeper learning approach;	+
An interdisciplinary and culturally relevant approach to literacy;	+
An affirming school environment that supports growth and identity development; and,	+
Knowledgeable, culturally competent, data-informed teachers.	+

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SUMMARY

In its first year of operation, Little Water Prep is establishing systems for tracking and monitoring data, professionally developing teachers and leaders, and generally administering the program to support the school's growth effectively throughout the first charter term. Board members, school leaders, and teachers are well aware of academic and operational data and use various data points to revise existing strategies and support decision making. Although the school experienced some staff member turnover in its first year and some positions were vacant at the time of the visit, teachers feel well supported to meet the success criteria set forth in the school's comprehensive evaluation system. Notwithstanding some early operational challenges, Little Water Prep is well positioned to continue developing in alignment with the tenets set forth in its charter proposal.

Pursuant to the Institute's inspection of Little Water Prep on April 18, 2023 and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto, the Institute determined Little Water Prep had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the "Charter Agreement") for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided.

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

### QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,<sup>1</sup> describe the elements in place at schools that are highly effective at providing students from low-income backgrounds the instruction, content, knowledge, and skills necessary to produce strong academic performance. The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, found in Appendix B, describe the elements an effective school must have in place at the time of renewal.<sup>2</sup>

For first year visits, the Institute focuses on academic program benchmarks to establish a baseline measure of the quality of the school's systems and procedures, which heavily affect the progress that a school is able to demonstrate in meeting its Accountability Plan goals during the charter term. The Institute expects a school to have moved from the beginning of implementation and the promise of future growth to full and effective implementation of a quality program by the time the school comes to renewal.

### ASSESSMENT

Little Water Prep is building a scalable data system that will continue to support effective decision making as the school grows. This year, the comprehensive assessment system keeps teachers and instructional leaders well informed of student learning progress and performance trends. The system includes various modalities for assessing students' skills and abilities. Teachers monitor the resulting data closely to make decisions about future instruction and determine which students may need extra support. Instructional leaders use the same data to identify topics for teacher coaching, professional development, and the revision and development of curricular materials.

Each month in English language arts ("ELA"), teachers use the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System ("F&P") to track student reading levels and the Success for All assessment to track student progress toward schoolwide reading goals. Teachers conduct formative assessments of reading fluency daily during guided reading. Each week, teachers and instructional leaders review ELA performance trends, create student groupings based on proximity to pre-established reading level goals, and modify instruction for these groups based on areas of low performance and end of year targets.

In mathematics, Kindergarten teachers administer the MAP assessment each trimester to track student progress. Teachers also pull students individually to complete individualized performance tasks to gauge progress toward numerical literacy. In lessons focusing on cognitively guided instruction ("CGI"), teachers observe students during independent work and use a tracker to categorize students based on the relative sophistication of problem solving strategies. Teachers also conduct formative assessments by taking observational notes as students work on tasks during mathematics lessons. If students struggle during mathematics lessons, teachers pull them as a small group for targeted support. Students take mathematics facts quizzes each month.

1. An extensive body of research, including a [report from Harvard](#) and a [report from the United States General Accounting Office](#), identifying and confirming the correlates of effective schools exists dating back four decades.

2. Additional details regarding the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are available on the [Institute's website](#).

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

### CURRICULUM

Little Water Prep's curricular materials support teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction, but the school faces unaddressed gaps in curriculum implementation for both ELA and mathematics. In ELA, teachers follow a scope and sequence document drafted by the head of school. Grade team lead teachers make shifts to the document as needed based on student performance trends. Teachers then write lesson plans for guided reading groups to support students with decoding skills and the shared reading of leveled texts. For writer's workshop, teachers follow scripted lesson plans. Despite the aforementioned balance of time devoted to phonics and writing instruction, instructional leaders are aware many Kindergarten students who began the year far below grade level expectations in reading are not on track to meet end of year goals. Little Water Prep accelerated its original staffing plan and hired a director of curriculum and instruction to increase its capacity to address gaps in the phonics curriculum.

Little Water Prep employs a mathematics curriculum that combines CGI and mathematics workshop to support students to develop number sense and problem solving strategies. School leaders selected this model to operationalize the charter's vision for students to engage in cognitively demanding tasks and student-led discourse pertaining to mathematics concepts. In its first year, school leaders recognize teachers are building clarity on the conceptual knowledge students must possess in order to access mathematics content in each subsequent grade level. The school made the purposeful decision to prioritize literacy instruction to catch students up to grade level expectations in the first year. In subsequent years, school leaders plan to emphasize effective CGI mathematics instruction in professional development and coaching sessions.

### PEDAGOGY

Teachers at Little Water Prep deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school's curriculum. Teachers meet with instructional leaders weekly to practice delivering instruction in front of peers. During these sessions, teachers receive feedback and coaching based on identified growth areas and seek clarification on lesson material to help them anticipate student misconceptions and plan effective responses. However, despite the common planning time set aside for lesson preparation, instructional leaders at Little Water Prep recognize a need to continue providing sustained support in the facilitation of CGI lessons in mathematics specifically to develop teachers' ability to pivot instruction when students struggle with problem solving tasks. In some lessons, teachers miss opportunities to check for understanding prior to the start of independent work and adjust instruction when students need more support understanding fundamental concepts related to the task. Consequently, some tasks exceeded students' mastery of number sense concepts and problem solving strategies. Students who successfully derived a problem solving strategy required scaffolding from a staff member to do so.

Little Water Prep differentiates ELA lesson content by reading ability regardless of grade level, effectively meeting students at their ability level and accelerating literacy growth. For instance, the Institute observed a mixed-grade group of students focused on consonant-vowel-consonant decoding, sight word drills, and fact recall questions during guided reading, while in another classroom, another mixed-grade group of students



## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

enthusiastically responded to higher order reading comprehension questions related to character emotions. In all ELA classrooms, teachers engaged in frequent checks for understanding while holding the majority of students accountable to expectations for participation.

Most teachers at Little Water Prep demonstrated strong classroom management skills. The school uses reflection circles and a diverse array of positive behavior reinforcements to manage behavior proactively. Leaders and teachers recognize the need to help students build stamina for independent seat work in ELA and mathematics. For significant behavior challenges that occur during the school day, the principal or classroom teacher escorts students to a yoga room to engage in self-calming activities.

### INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In its first year, Little Water Prep is building a strong school leadership team, establishing high, clear expectations for teacher performance, and linking expectations to teacher coaching and evaluation practices. The head of school, serving as Little Water Prep's instructional coach and evaluator, is establishing clear expectations for targeted, effective instruction that meets student needs, coaching teachers on specific strategies to meet those needs, and monitoring teachers' progress in their development. The head of school has a clear plan to grow the capacity of the leadership team for future years.

The head of school and dean of scholar support provide frequent and consistent coaching to support teachers with goal attainment. Teachers are clear on performance expectations. Observation feedback aligns to stated expectations and the school's instructional priorities for this year, which include developing literacy and early reading skills including among the school's most vulnerable students and developing teachers to deliver the school's mathematics curricula with fidelity. Teachers and leaders also use time in weekly grade level team meetings to discuss planned instruction and rehearse lesson delivery. This cycle of preparation, rehearsal, delivery, coaching, and feedback is developing teachers to deliver effective instruction this year. Teachers and leaders report the first of two rounds of teacher evaluations was thorough and fair in the context of the school's continuous cycle of practice and developmental feedback. The school will complete a second round of teacher evaluations before the end of the year. The criteria for evaluations are clear and link directly to the school's coaching cycle.

Little Water Prep is establishing professional development routines that, along with regular real time coaching, develop effective teachers. Teachers learned the school's instructional philosophy and became familiar with its curricular materials during summer pre-service professional development sessions. During the school year, leaders transitioned the focus of professional development sessions to more concrete tactics to develop teachers' abilities to manage their classrooms, deliver instruction effectively, and administer reading assessments reliably.

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

### AT-RISK PROGRAM

Little Water Prep effectively supports students struggling academically, students with disabilities, and English language learners (“ELLs”). The school implements clear procedures to identify struggling students with fidelity. The school receives individualized education programs (“IEPs”) from each sending district. Otherwise, Little Water Prep relies on a tight cycle of progress monitoring embedded in its response to intervention (“RTI”) program to identify students who may qualify for an IEP but don’t already have one. Little Water Prep has a reliable and compliant process to identify ELLs. That process begins with prospective families completing a home language survey as part of the school’s application. Based on those results, the dean of scholar support interviews each family that indicates speaking a language other than English at home. Where appropriate based on the interview, students complete the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (“NYSITELL”). This year, Little Water Prep enrolls and serves only one ELL but anticipates more ELLs will enroll next year.

Little Water Prep established a six-week RTI cycle wherein teachers and instructional leaders carefully monitor student progress toward clearly defined objectives in their areas of greatest need. Teachers record progress by way of various classroom and curricular assessments in the school’s trackers along with qualitative notes about student performance. Teachers and leaders discuss student progress at regular meetings and determine how to modify supports as needed. The RTI process functionally supports the data collection required to refer a struggling student to the district’s committee on special education for evaluation for services.

This year, Little Water Prep experienced turnover in several instructional positions. At the time of the visit, the school was working to fill vacancies for special educators. Some classrooms requiring a co-teacher were not staffed sufficiently. However, the school’s RTI program and targeted approach to literacy and mathematics instruction supports students’ immediate learning needs.

Little Water Prep’s dean of scholar support provides English language acquisition services to the school’s one ELL. Although academic attainment across the school is lower than stated goals according to internal and normed assessments, no subgroup of students who may struggle academically categorically performs lower than the school overall.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Little Water Prep’s organization supports the development and delivery of a high-quality educational program. The school’s administrative structure provides sufficient support to the development of the program. Although the director of operations position was vacant at the time of the visit, Little Water Prep’s team has a contingency plan in place along with clear plans to fill the role in the future. The head of school and board are thoughtfully committed to hiring for key positions and developing internal talent as the school grows.

Little Water Prep is establishing administrative systems that support the school’s function and provide teachers, leaders, and the board with information needed for decision making. The school has a variety of tracking and monitoring tools for academic, finance, and compliance measures, all tied to a central information

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

and data repository. School leaders and teachers are establishing procedures and practices that capitalize on the school's data systems to drive effective instruction and inform a school culture focused on academic achievement. The school has a clear discipline system in place where teachers and leaders support each other to maximize student focus on learning.

At 90% of its chartered enrollment, the school maintains adequate enrollment this year. As the school establishes its reputation in a community not accustomed to charter schools, Little Water Prep's leaders and board members are confident in the school's outlook for enrollment in the years to come.

### BOARD OVERSIGHT & GOVERNANCE

Little Water Prep's board capitalizes on its skills to develop effective structures and procedures to oversee and govern the charter school. The board's committees meet regularly. Each committee and the head of school report out to the full board and provide sufficient information for the board to make decisions. The board's priorities align with the stated priorities of the leadership team and the teachers. The school established information systems to keep the board informed about progress toward meeting priorities and goals.

The board effectively supports the head of school. During its first year and as the first charter school in the county, Little Water Prep works hard to maintain its facility and sustain positive relationships with district and community. The board supports the school's leader in these efforts as necessary, often functioning with the school leader as one unit working toward achievement of its goals. Notwithstanding, the board has clear criteria for determining the head of school's success and has plans to execute a clear and comprehensive performance review at the end of this year. The board also plans to conduct a comprehensive self assessment and defined a clear procedure to do so.

Little Water Prep

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## APPENDICES

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LITTLE WATER PREPARATORY CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>1</sup>

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Kevin Collins	Lucy Volkmar
TREASURER	Dr. Rachelle M. Hall
Steven Strom	Kadeem Talent Davis
SECRETARY	
Brendan Mee	

CHARTER LEADERS

PRINCIPAL
Antoinette Kane, Head of School (2022-23 to Present)

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT <sup>2</sup>	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2022-23	120	108	90%	K-1

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



## APPENDIX A: CHARTER SCHOOL OVERVIEW



### CHARTER SCHOOL VISIT HISTORY

SCHOOL YEAR	VISIT TYPE	DATE
2022-23	First Year Visit	April 18, 2023

### CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
April 18, 2023	Jeff Wasbes	Executive Deputy Director for Accountability
	Ciani Jones	Senior Analyst
	Saadia Santos	Performance and Systems Analyst
	Kathryn Connell-Espinosa	Interim Executive Director

### CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Initial	First Year of a Four Year Accountability Period	Fall 2025

### VERSION 5.0, MAY 2012

### INTRODUCTION

The State University of New York Charter Renewal Benchmarks<sup>1</sup> (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: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/renewal/>. 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.

*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.*



- 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, teacher and community members is also available on the Institute’s website at: <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/renewal/>. Please do not hesitate to contact the Institute with any questions.



**RENEWAL QUESTION 1**  
**IS THE SCHOOL AN ACADEMIC SUCCESS?**

**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.

**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.

**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.

### 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.

### 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 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.





## 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;
  - 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?**

**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.

**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.

**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.

## 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.

## 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 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.
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## **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;
  - 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.
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**RENEWAL QUESTION 3**  
**IS THE SCHOOL FISCALLY SOUND?**

**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.

**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;
- 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.



### 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.

### 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;
- 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?**

#### 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.

#### 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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

