

THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT
DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL HIGHBRIDGE
VISIT DATE: FEBRUARY 28, 2023
REPORT DATE: June 2, 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 February 28, 2023 first year school evaluation visit to the DREAM Charter School Highbridge ("DREAM Highbridge").

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

DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL HIGHBRIDGE

1501 Jerome Ave, Bronx, NY, 10452 | Grades: K | NYC Community School District 9

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for DREAM Highbridge on October 4, 2018. The charter opened in the fall of 2022 serving 60 students in Kindergarten.



MISSION

The mission of DREAM Charter School is to prepare students for high-performing high schools, colleges, and beyond through a rigorous academic program that develops critical thinkers who demonstrate a love of learning, strong character, and a commitment to wellness and active citizenship. DREAM Charter School inspires all students to recognize their potential and realize their dreams.

CURRENT CHARTER

Serves: Kindergarten
Chartered Enrollment: 60
Charter Expiration: July 31, 2027

ANTICIPATED 2026-27

Grades Served: Kindergarten – 4th and 6th – 8th
Chartered Enrollment: 630

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Innovative curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and questioning;	+
Co-teaching model that reduces the teacher-to-student ratio and integrates students with special needs into the general school population;	+
Robust data cycle that uses data to inform all aspects of teaching and learning;	+
Whole child approach to teaching and learning that deeply integrates health, wellness, music, and the arts into the overall school program;	+
Extended day and an extended year model that maximizes learning hours;	+
Active family engagement program that fosters parent/guardian participation, leadership, and advocacy;	+
Focus on teacher motivation, development, and retention; and,	+
Universal pre-Kindergarten program that ignites learning in children.	N/A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SUNY Trustees have authorized DREAM Charter School (“DREAM Schools”), a not-for-profit charter school education corporation, to operate three charter schools. DREAM Charter School (“DREAM”) received its original charter from the New York City Schools Chancellor (“NYC Chancellor”) in 2008, and the New York State Board of Regents (the “Board of Regents”) approved the charter on January 15, 2008. The Board of Regents approved an initial full-term renewal through June 30, 2013. In 2017, DREAM applied to transfer authorizers and the SUNY Trustees approved the transfer application on June 8, 2017. The SUNY Trustees issued a five year, full-term renewal, granting DREAM the authority to operate through June 30, 2023.

On October 4, 2018, the SUNY Trustees approved the charters for DREAM Charter School Highbridge (“DREAM Highbridge”), which opened in the fall of 2022 offering one Kindergarten cohort containing 60 students. DREAM Schools partners with the New York not-for-profit corporation Harlem RBI, Inc., doing business as DREAM (“DREAM Network” or the “network”), which provides back office services including operational, fundraising, and facilities support. It also provides after school and summer programming. The founders originally created the organization to provide baseball to community youth, and it has since become a pillar of the East Harlem and South Bronx communities by growing to serve students through its enrichment programs and the founding of DREAM Schools.

Pursuant to the Institute’s inspection of DREAM Highbridge at the above address on August 29, 2022, as well as documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto, the Institute determined that DREAM Highbridge (the “education corporation”) had completed substantially all of the Prior Actions required of it as defined in the Charter Agreement between the education corporation and the SUNY Trustees (the “Charter Agreement”) for the operation of the school. Therefore, per Section 3.1 of the Charter Agreement, the Institute permitted the education corporation to provide instruction at the school to students in accordance with the plan provided in the Charter Agreement.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

QUALITATIVE BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks, grounded in the body of research from the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University,¹ 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.²

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

DREAM Highbridge has an assessment system that improves instructional effectiveness and student learning. The charter administers reliable, valid assessments that align to state standards and the charter's curricular programs, and it incorporates a broad array of assessment tools to drive instruction and track student progress including NWEA MAP, i-Ready, Wit & Wisdom end of module assessments, Core Knowledge Language Arts ("CKLA") unit assessments, interim assessments, weekly mastery checks in mathematics for story problems, and exit tickets that check for student mastery of learning objectives at the end of each lesson. Teachers and school leaders meet twice weekly to analyze assessment results by subgroup and to plan whole group and small group instruction based on needs identified by the analysis. Leaders hold teachers accountable for strong student outcomes and link teacher evaluations to NWEA MAP interim assessment results.

CURRICULUM

DREAM Highbridge teachers have ample access to curricular materials to support them in meeting the educational and social emotional needs of students. However, the school is refining its approach to curriculum modification and implementation as it rolls out new curricular materials. As a network, DREAM Schools has embarked on a three-year plan to incorporate the Science of Reading framework for early reading instruction. This shift calls for the adoption of new curricular materials and an increased emphasis on direct instruction in phonics and writing. For its Kindergarten cohort, DREAM Highbridge uses CKLA as its Science of Reading aligned phonics curriculum along with Wit & Wisdom for reading comprehension and writing. To aid in the implementation of curricula, DREAM Highbridge partners with the Literacy Group consulting company to provide summer professional development, assessment modifications, and classroom walkthroughs while school leadership guides teachers with intellectual preparation for curricular concepts and the analysis of

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

assessment outcomes. DREAM Highbridge still has considerable room to improve its rollout of the English language arts (“ELA”) program with teachers expressing a need for more engaging, culturally relevant texts and expanded professional development to help them develop effective instructional strategies for addressing student learning gaps. Currently, teachers significantly adapt the curricular program by providing supplemental readers to make content more culturally relevant to students.

In mathematics, DREAM Highbridge uses a network generated curriculum that incorporates Cognitively Guided Instruction (“CGI”), TERC Investigations, and Context for Learning Mathematics. At the Kindergarten level, students explore base-10 mathematical concepts through story problems that encourage the development of problem solving strategies.

PEDAGOGY

Teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum, but instructional leaders recognize the opportunity to refine some aspects of its current ELA programming to fully support teachers in delivering a program that meets the needs of students. Across classrooms, the Institute observed strong classroom management systems and positive classroom climate. Students demonstrate internalization of routines and behavioral expectations and school staff members promptly address intermittent instances of disruptive behavior. Teachers regularly and effectively check for student understanding while maximizing learning time with appropriate pacing and efficient transitions.

Mathematics instruction incorporates story problems, mathematics workshop and i-Ready practice, with students receiving intervention as needed. The Institute observed students discussing individual problem solving strategies with instructors and peers while teachers demonstrated a skillful use of higher order thinking prompts to expand student reflection. Teachers also differentiated content by skill level on a consistent basis.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

DREAM Highbridge establishes high expectations for instruction and student achievement. The principal provides in the moment coaching to teachers by modeling pedagogical moves and strategies for closing gaps during lessons in real time. Informal observations occur at least once per week with the principal providing face-to-face or written feedback to teachers directly thereafter. Network leaders also conduct informal lesson observations to further support teachers’ development. Leaders maintain a data platform that allows the leadership team to track teacher practices, identify areas for growth, and give direct feedback linked to student performance. Leaders also facilitate intellectual planning (“IP”) meetings twice a week during which teachers internalize lesson content and review student performance data to design reteach opportunities and plan for student misconceptions. To support the principal in designing weekly professional development sessions, the charter partners with an external consultant while the network curriculum team provides additional

3. A Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence curriculum that provides teachers with strategies for recognizing the student emotional states and tools for adjusting instruction in a responsive manner.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

professional development for leaders and teachers. While the charter has a consistent system in place for coaching, observing, and developing teachers, it has the opportunity to fine tune its efforts. For example, teachers indicate that although real time coaching and modeling during lessons helps them meet the needs of students in the moment, post-lesson feedback does not often align to the classroom observation rubric.

AT-RISK PROGRAM

DREAM Highbridge has clearly defined screening procedures for identifying at-risk students and providing them with appropriate interventions. The network uses a three-tiered Response to Intervention (“RTI”) system to support students struggling academically or emotionally. In Kindergarten, the director of student services (“DSS”) and youth development specialist (“YDS”) select students for tier 2 intervention based on interim assessment results related to phonics, number sense, and coping skills. Once a student begins receiving tier 2 services, intervention staff members meet weekly to review progress monitoring data and revise learning goals. Staff members then develop next steps and share with classroom teachers. Each week, the team also removes, adjusts, or adds interventions as needed based on assessment outcomes. If a student has not responded to tier 2 intervention during a four to eight week cycle, teachers must submit an RTI tier 3 student support request form. Once the form is completed, the teacher or advisor will be invited to an RTI monthly meeting to collaborate on a learning plan for the student. If a student does not respond to tier 3 intervention, the charter refers the student to the district Committee on Special Education (“CSE”) for evaluation. For ELLs, the DSS holds intellectual preparation meetings during which the DREAM Highbridge principal receives coaching in how to support students in the areas of oral language, reading, writing, and listening using the integrated co-teaching (“ICT”) model.

The DSS oversees special education programming for the network while managing a staff of special education coordinators, YDS’s, family engagement supervisors, and mental health practitioners based at each campus. At the beginning of the school year, the DSS guides school-based special education staff members through the process of understanding each student’s Individualized Education Plan (“IEP”) classification and identifying classroom strategies that will assist students in reaching IEP goals. At DREAM Highbridge, each Kindergarten classroom contains a general education teacher and learning specialist who delivers intervention services, and the YDS works closely with teachers to develop instructional strategies for academic intervention and social emotional support. The YDS also provides small group SEL intervention on a weekly or biweekly basis. As the school year progresses, classroom teachers continue to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies based on classroom observation and performance data, making adjustments as needed.

However, there is a need to increase staff member capacity to deliver instruction and behavioral interventions to meet the needs of special populations. At the time of the first-year visit, teachers reported not having the direct support of an intervention specialist due to a position vacancy and also reported a need for more professional development pertaining to instructional and behavior management strategies for students with disabilities and ELLs.

BENCHMARK SUMMARY

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

DREAM Highbridge has clearly defined staff member roles and a comprehensive set of academic and operational systems to support its educational program. DREAM Highbridge's director of operations works closely with charter leaders and teachers to identify and monitor school culture trends while leading procedures related to arrival and dismissal, monitoring classroom and school supplies, and scheduling. The director of operations also supports the director of enrollment and recruitment by following up with family phone calls, recruiting students and families, and fostering parent relationships to ensure effective student retention. Charter leaders effectively track and respond to schoolwide academic trends and recognize the need to provide additional management training for the director of operations as the charter continues to grow.

DREAM Highbridge

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SUNY RENEWAL
BENCHMARKS

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DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL HIGHBRIDGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES¹

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Ashish Doshi	Vikrant Sawhney
VICE CHAIR	Peter Daneker
Michele Joerg	
TREASURER	
Jonathan Schmerin	
SECRETARY	
Jonathan Gyurko	

CHARTER LEADERS

PRINCIPAL
Shannel Richardson, Principal (2022-23 to Present)

CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT ²	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADES SERVED
2022-23	60	51	85%	K

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	February 28, 2023

CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
February 28, 2023	Ciani Jones	Senior Analyst
	Vickie Masséus	School Evaluation Analyst

CHARTER CYCLE CONTEXT

CHARTER TERM	ACCOUNTABILITY PERIOD	ANTICIPATED RENEWAL VISIT
Initial	First Year of a Four Year Accountability Period	Fall 2026



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:

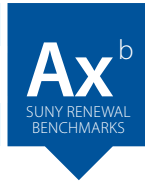
- They provide a framework for the Charter Schools Institute (the “Institute”) to gather and evaluate evidence to determine whether a school has established a track record of outcomes and practices that merit a positive renewal recommendation
- The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks provide the school with a guide to understanding the Institute’s evaluative criteria. As the Institute uses the SUNY Renewal Benchmarks as the framework for conducting its ongoing school evaluation visits, school leaders should be fully aware of the content of the Benchmarks.

The SUNY Renewal Benchmarks are organized into four 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.

The Practices, Policies and Procedures for the Renewal of Charter Schools Authorized by the State University of New York (the “SUNY Renewal Practices”) document on the Institute’s [website](#) outlines the Institute’s approach to using the Renewal Benchmarks. 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

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.



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.

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:

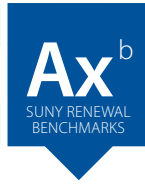
- teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum;
- teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding;
- teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth 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.
-

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.
-



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.

