

# THE SUNY CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

*FIRST YEAR SCHOOL EVALUATION REPORT  
FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER  
SCHOOLS HIGH SCHOOL*

*VISIT DATE: MAY 4, 2023*

*REPORT DATE: JUNE 22, 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 May 4, 2023 first year school evaluation visit to Family Life Academy Charter Schools High School ("FLACS High"). FLACS High is the fourth charter in the Family Life Academy Charter Schools ("FLACS Schools") education corporation. By design, FLACS High will serve as an extension of FLACS Schools' middle school program serving FLACS students and students from the broader community. FLACS High participates in the shared services agreement across all FLACS Schools' charters.

### 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 the visit. 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

# FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOLS HIGH SCHOOL

890 Washington Avenue | Grade: 9 | NYC Community School District 7

The SUNY Trustees approved the original charter for FLACS High on March 4, 2019. The charter opened in Fall 2022, serving 100 students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**MISSION**  
*Family Life Academy Charter Schools, together with the Latino Pastoral Action Center and parents, creates the conditions for self empowerment for all its Kindergarten – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students to excel academically, take responsibility for their own learning, and affirm human values, today, in college, and beyond.*

### CURRENT CHARTER

Serves: 9<sup>th</sup>  
Chartered Enrollment: 100  
Charter Expiration: July 31, 2027

### ANTICIPATED 2026-27

Grades Served: 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>  
Chartered Enrollment: 702

### KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

Rigorous academic program with a focus on scholars doing the heavy lifting;	–
Data driven planning fueled by a rigorous system of assessment and accountability;	+
Intentional approaches to meeting the needs of all scholars including English language learners;	+
Professional learning that enriches teaching and increases scholar achievement;	+



## CHARTER BACKGROUND

### KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS CONTINUED

Caring and consistent discipline;	+
Family involvement and empowerment;	+
Shared responsibility for learning between the scholars, their family, and the school;	+
School communities that affirm human values;	+
A focus on preparation for college, career, and civic life; and,	+
A continued use of community resources.	+

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FLACS High builds upon the FLACS Schools' model in its founding year and has most of the foundational systems required to ensure viability and academic success moving forward.

FLACS High's assessment systems allow teachers to access student performance data and track academic growth. The program regularly assesses student progress through the NWEA MAP ("MAP") assessments and internally developed benchmark assessments aligned with state standards. A curriculum review group composed of curriculum experts from the shared services team and representatives from the high school, middle school, and elementary school is in the initial stages of evaluating curricular programs across the network to ensure the vertical and horizontal alignment across grade levels that would support students' academic success. In the interim, FLACS High uses internally developed lesson materials for English language arts ("ELA"), mathematics, science, and history that align with state standards. Leaders establish lesson planning expectations and teachers follow expectations with fidelity. As a result, lessons across subjects incorporate essential elements of the FLACS Schools' curricular philosophy including literacy focus, student engagement, and gradual release.

Leaders and teachers at FLACS High establish an environment that balances warmth and high expectations. Lessons are purposeful and students demonstrate both an understanding of routines and expectations as well as an internalization of the FLACS Schools' mission and values. Instructional leaders establish regular and sustained systems of walkthroughs, observation, and feedback, as well as professional development that provides opportunities for leaders to collect information on teacher performance and provide individualized and whole group support to instructional staff. Staff members report a positive working environment that feels supportive and tailored to meet and develop professional needs. The school is well positioned to build upon these strengths to deepen rigor in the classroom and develop teachers' skills in checking for student understanding, as these practices were not consistently present across lessons at the time of the Institute's visit.

FLACS High meets the needs of students at risk of academic failure, but does not have sufficient systems and procedures to support the needs of all students as the program grows to capacity over the charter term. While the small program size ensures that teachers are aware of students' individual education program ("IEP") goals, the Institute found limited evidence of internal referral procedures, codified descriptions of tiered interventions, or routine means of regularly reviewing sub-population performance that would support the school in scaling the intervention program.

FLACS Schools supports FLACS High in its first year of operation in delivering an effective educational program. The shared services team supports the school with back-office services, such as finances, hiring, enrollment, and marketing. At the time of the Institute's visit, the program was at 97% chartered enrollment.

Pursuant to the Institute's inspection of FLACS High at the above address on August 24, 2022, and documentation provided to or inspected by the Institute at that visit and prior/post thereto, the Institute determined that FLACS High (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,<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

FLACS High administers a variety of benchmark assessments throughout the year and teachers effectively use assessment results to modify instruction, inform student groupings, monitor progress toward goals, and test the effectiveness of interventions. Although FLACS High routinely reviews benchmark and summative assessment data to inform instructional shifts and student groupings, the charter has yet to establish a regular practice of analyzing daily student work and exit tickets, which leads to delays in delivering academic interventions in the general education setting.

FLACS High administers the MAP nationally normed benchmark assessment each quarter to monitor student progress toward end-of-year goals, as well as mock Regents exams to project student performance on state standards in mathematics and science. Internally, teachers draft midterm assessments for all content areas within co-planning groups, and administrators review the exams to ensure alignment with Regents standards. Teachers also create formative and summative unit assessments for mathematics and ELA to gauge mastery, while teachers in social studies and music develop project-based assessments for students. A network data analyst supports leadership with interpreting the multiple data points, and the Institute noted that school staff members have a strong command of quarterly academic growth trends within subject areas and student subgroups. In order to identify areas of focus for students struggling academically, the charter pulls disaggregated data from the Performance Matters and Lexia assessment platforms to run item analyses by standard.

Instructional leaders actively incorporate item analyses as part of their response to performance gaps associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, using the results to design reteach lessons, measure growth on retests, and inform instructional priorities for the tutoring program. Leaders have also responded to trends in assessment results by adding a second intervention block to the daily schedule to increase time on task,

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

and integrating blended learning as an intervention strategy by having students use self-paced academic software via Khan Academy and Edmentum. Instructional leaders noted low baseline data from September confirmed many students lacked the foundational skills needed to access grade-level curriculum. In response, Instructional leaders created materials to build students' foundational skills. Although the current assessment timeline affords actionable data to teachers, leaders recognize the need to review student work more frequently to make instructional pivots that accelerate learning given student learning gaps upon entering high school.

### CURRICULUM

FLACS High curricula build upon the strong foundational materials provided by the shared services team and supports teachers with instructional planning. The network provides curricular maps and pacing guides that guide teachers in knowing what to teach and when to teach it. The school uses internally developed curricular materials for ELA and mathematics aligned with New York State learning standards. FLACS Schools' internal ELA curricula takes a balanced approach to teaching literacy with the goal that students become independent and capable readers, writers, listeners, and speakers through a variety of activities such as close reading of texts, targeted literacy instruction, and small group instruction. FLACS High builds upon the foundational Kindergarten — 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics curriculum, which uses Math in Focus and Singapore Math. Likewise, the high school science and history curricula expand upon the materials developed for Kindergarten — 8<sup>th</sup> grade with updates from the curriculum and instruction team to align with the high school standards.

FLACS High teachers expand upon the network literacy and mathematics models through purposeful planning. Teachers develop lesson plans based on provided materials and regularly submit plans to instructional leaders for review and feedback. At FLACS High, teachers have a high degree of autonomy when planning lessons, and instructional leaders only require teachers to follow a gradual release template that includes learning targets and associated standards, modifications for English language learners ("ELLs"), featured vocabulary, and potential student misconceptions. Teachers use the gradual release model to guide planning of corresponding activities and materials. Teachers also modify pacing calendars independently based on individual knowledge of the state's expectations for their respective subject areas. FLACS High's instructional leaders set high expectations for lesson planning and teachers submit lesson plans using the expected template with fidelity. After composing lessons, teachers submit them in two-week batches for feedback. Coaches then conduct informal classroom visits to monitor feedback implementation.

At the time of the visit, the network curriculum and instruction team are reviewing curricular materials for Kindergarten – 12<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics and ELA to ensure vertical and horizontal alignment. The shared services team will continue revising and evaluating the curricula through summer 2023 in preparation for the 2023-24 school year. Ensuring ongoing fidelity to new curricula and lesson planning expectations will support teachers in delivering rigorous lessons.

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

### PEDAGOGY

FLACS High teachers exhibit the ability to manage classrooms effectively and establish a positive climate while students demonstrate internalized expectations for behavior and classroom routines. Furthermore, teachers consistently support on-task student behavior by being prepared to teach and by giving clear directions. When observing classrooms, the Institute noted lessons with clear learning objectives aligned to Regents standards and the intentional use of vocabulary mapping and visual aids to enhance student understanding of subject matter. However, despite the high degree of teacher preparation, there is little evidence that teachers promote higher order thinking in classrooms either through classroom dialogue or written work. Instead, teacher voice predominates in most phases of a lesson, and teachers rarely ask students to explain their thinking through student-to-student or student-to-teacher interaction. In most instances in which teachers present new or complex concepts to students, teachers pose reflection questions while providing the answer themselves instead of allowing students to respond. As a result, it is unclear the degree to which students grasp key concepts from lessons. Similarly, the Institute observed infrequent checks for understanding in classrooms with teachers pausing only occasionally to ask basic fact recall questions. In one instance, the Institute noted a teacher circulating during guided practice without checking student writing against the exemplar, and multiple students produced work that was not aligned to the rigor of the associated standard. In other instances, the Institute observed ineffective lesson pacing in which lessons moved too fast to accommodate student dialogue or too slow to maximize learning time with students sitting idle during independent practice.

FLACS leaders recognize the lack of higher order thinking in classrooms as well as the need to strengthen professional development to support effective lesson delivery and implementation of other schoolwide instructional goals. For example, in addition to increasing the level of higher order thinking in classrooms, leaders also want to refine the use of data-driven student grouping so that teachers provide targeted support based on groupings and state clear expectations to students for the execution of group work.

### INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The FLACS High instructional leadership team has the capacity to provide responsive teacher coaching and professional development rooted in subject area expertise, and the leadership team establishes routines and systems for supporting teachers with data-driven instructional planning. However, due to the current volume of competing instructional priorities, leaders have yet to address areas of concern identified earlier in the school year, citing the need to strengthen existing systems that support teacher development.

At the beginning of the school year, instructional leaders derived a set of instructional priorities based on findings from classroom walkthroughs and outstanding areas of need across classrooms. Leaders then designed coaching strategies and professional development syllabi to address the targeted concerns. Instructional leaders state that FLACS High's current priorities include the application of higher order thinking questions during lessons, the alignment of learning targets with lesson plans, vocabulary building across subject areas, and the expanded use of data to inform instruction. They have directed teachers to pre-teach key concepts prior to delivery of a lesson and to incorporate responses to student misconceptions within lesson plans. Teachers build their competency to address instructional priorities by participating in weekly

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

professional learning community (“PLC”) meetings with school leadership. During these meetings, teachers also adjust instructional plans and student groupings based on performance trends, review lesson structure and implementation techniques, and discuss the alignment of learning targets to state standards. At the network level, FLACS Schools’ instructional coaches and content area specialists also maintain a PLC with the goal of setting network-wide coaching strategies for teachers. The Institute observed the positive impact of these priorities across the school as teachers consistently planned rigorous objectives-aligned lessons based on data and used varied methods to support vocabulary acquisition.

Instructional leaders acknowledge that there is room to improve the PLC meeting structure so that it further supports instructional outcomes. Noted growth areas include increasing instructional rigor, providing additional intellectual preparation supports for teachers, and improving teachers’ ability to address student misconceptions during lesson delivery. At the time of the Institute’s visit, instructional leaders confirmed that all teachers have individual preparation periods for planning and that at-risk teachers have designated blocks for common planning, but it is not clear if school leaders encourage the use of planning periods for intellectual preparation. Teachers also report developing responses to student misconceptions based solely on previous teaching experience, rather than doing so based on professional development or under the guidance of an instructional leader.

The FLACS High principal formally evaluates teachers twice per year using the Danielson framework, and instructional leaders carry out informal observations frequently. After conducting observations, leaders hold debrief meetings and log feedback notes into the TeachBoost platform. For teacher coaching, FLACS Schools employs the impact cycle as a methodology that guides teachers in setting instructional goals and defining strategies they will use to meet the goals. The impact cycle also calls for coaches to model teaching strategies and monitor teacher implementation of the strategies while offering feedback to improve effectiveness. Coaches regularly view student data to assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

### AT-RISK PROGRAM

FLACS High meets the needs of students at risk of academic failure, but does not yet have systems and procedures to support the needs of all students as the program grows to capacity over the charter term. FLACS High staff members rely on MAP results and informal referrals to recommend students receive additional intervention services. Given that FLACS High serves a single grade, staff members primarily informally refer students for services and the composition of small groups shifts on an ad hoc basis.

The school delivers a multi-tiered system of supports where students receive increasing intensity of interventions based on performance. If students do not make adequate academic progress, FLACS High’s special education team works with the Committee on Special Education (“CSE”) to evaluate the student for special education services. At the time of the visit, two students had successfully completed the referral and identification process with the CSE, and two other students were expected to receive additional IEP support. General education and special education teacher support services (“SETSS”) providers use targeted intervention, small group instruction, and push-in and pull-out groups to support students in the general

## BENCHMARK SUMMARY

education program. During lessons, teachers use various materials such as graphic organizers, modified texts, direct vocabulary instruction, and visual aids to help students access grade level content. Some lessons also use various integrated co-teaching models to support students in the general education classroom. While the small program size ensures that teachers are aware of students' IEP goals, the Institute found limited evidence of internal referral procedures, codified descriptions of tiered interventions, or routine means of regularly reviewing sub-population performance that would support the school in scaling the intervention program.

FLACS High identifies ELLs by administering the home language questionnaire and New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners ("NYSITELL") upon enrollment, if necessary. The school's ELL teacher provides targeted support to transitioning and expanding ELLs. Entering and emerging ELLs receive more intensive language support through stand-alone English as a second language instruction. The school tracks ELLs' academic progress on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test ("NYSESLAT"). The school does not yet have full systems and routines to track ELL performance against set performance goals.

### ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

FLACS Schools supports FLACS High in delivering an effective educational program. The shared services team supports the school with back-office services, such as finances, hiring, enrollment, and marketing. The shared services team's administrative team and structure support the school in carrying out its academic program. Furthermore, the shared services team provides opportunities for teachers and leaders at FLACS High to collaborate and coordinate with staff members at the middle school and shared services curriculum team. With the support of the shared service's curriculum specialists and individuals with previous high school expertise, the school is evaluating curricular programs and is in the midst of selecting and updating materials for the upcoming school year.

At the building level, all staff members demonstrate a clear understanding of the organizational reporting structure and are fully resourced to effectively carry out their jobs. Leaders establish multiple systems for collecting feedback including biannual surveys and procedures for reporting needs through grade team leads. Staff members report a culture of trust and openness and feel comfortable sharing feedback and are confident that feedback will be addressed.

As outlined in its growth plan, FLACS High does not employ a dean of students to support teachers and leaders. While many staff members shared that such a role would support teachers with day-to-day instruction, all observations conducted at the time of the Institute's visit indicated a warm and positive classroom environment built upon strong systems and routines to manage classroom behavior.

The program demonstrates strong enrollment. FLACS High recruits 8<sup>th</sup> graders from the FLACS Schools' middle school and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from outside the education corporation. At the time of the Institute's visit, the program was at 97% chartered enrollment with 50% of students matriculating from the FLACS Schools' middle school program.



FLACS High

# Ax

## APPENDICES

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CHARTER  
OVERVIEW

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**SB<sup>B</sup>**  
SUNY RENEWAL  
BENCHMARKS

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## APPENDIX A: CHARTER SCHOOL OVERVIEW

### FAMILY LIFE ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOLS BOARD OF TRUSTEES<sup>1</sup>

CHAIR	TRUSTEES
Wanda Torres-Mercado	Bryan Rivera
VICE CHAIR	Dr. Janet Marie Lerner
Susana Rivera-Leon	Joseph Holland
TREASURER	Florance Wolpoff
Pedro Alvarez	Kevin Kearns
SECRETARY	Carla Barrios-Alvarez
Miguel Peña	Bishop Raymond Rivera
	Hilda Sanchez
	Diana Jimenez
	Eneroliza Castillo
	Kelly Nuñez
	Carolyn Polanco

### CHARTER LEADERS

PRINCIPAL
<i>Jose Martinez (2022-23 to Present)</i>

### CHARTER CHARACTERISTICS

SCHOOL YEAR	CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	ACTUAL ENROLLMENT <sup>2</sup>	ACTUAL AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHARTERED ENROLLMENT	GRADE SERVED
2022-23	100	97	97%	9

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	May 4, 2023

### CONDUCT OF THE VISIT

DATE(S) OF REVIEW	EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS	TITLE
May 4, 2023	Erin Allen	Senior Analyst
	Ciani Jones	Senior 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 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:*

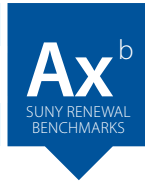
- teachers deliver purposeful lessons with clear objectives aligned to the school’s curriculum;
- teachers regularly and effectively use techniques to check for student understanding;
- teachers include opportunities in their lessons to challenge students with questions and activities that develop depth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

