



Charter School Annual Site Visit Report  
Charter Schools Accountability and Support  
2011-2012

**THE EQUITY PROJECT CHARTER SCHOOL  
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

**MARCH 2012**

## Part 1: Executive Summary

### **School Overview and History:**

The Equity Project Charter School (TEP) is a middle school serving approximately 358 students from fifth through seventh grade in the 2011-12 school year.<sup>1</sup> The school is in the fourth year of its first charter term, although it took a planning year in 2008-09. It plans to expand to eighth grade during its current charter term (ending in 2013), at which point it will be operating at its full capacity of grades offered.<sup>2</sup> It has not stated any plans for further grade expansion or replication during its current or, if approved for renewal, next charter term. TEP is currently housed in annex trailers in District 6. The school's student body includes 89.1% students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, 25.1% English Language Learners, and 20.4% special education students.<sup>3</sup>

The school has experienced low student attrition over the past two years, with 1.6% turnover in 2010-11 and 3.4% turnover as of March 15, 2012.<sup>4</sup> As of March 2012, there were 224 students on TEP's waitlist.<sup>5</sup> The average attendance rate for school year 2011-12 was 97% at the time of the visit.<sup>6</sup>

TEP earned a B on its first NYC DOE Progress Report (in 2010-2011).<sup>7</sup> The school's scores on the NYC DOE School Survey in 2010-11 were well above average in all categories (Academic Expectations, Communication, Engagement, Safety and Respect) with 99% of parents and 100% of teachers and students participating.<sup>8</sup> The school is in good standing with state and federal accountability measures.<sup>9</sup>

The Equity Project Charter School is an independent charter school not associated with a charter management organization (CMO) or other parent organization. The school has had one leader, Zeke Vanderhoek, since its inception.

### **Annual Review Process Overview:**

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) office of Charter Schools Accountability and Support (CSAS) conducts an annual site visit of charter schools authorized by the NYC DOE. The site visit is designed to address three primary questions: is the school an academic success; is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization; and is the school in compliance with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations? To ascertain matters of sustainability and strategic planning, we also ask about the school's plans for its next charter term. The visits are conducted by representatives of CSAS and last the duration of one school day. The annual site visit begins with a meeting with the school leadership team. Afterward, the reviewers visit classrooms and hold brief meetings with available administrators and teachers. Areas of evaluation include, but are not limited to: academic goals and mission; curriculum and instruction; school culture and learning environment; assessment utilization; parent engagement; government structures and organizational design; community support; special populations; and safety and security. The site visit is intended to provide a snapshot of the school and reflects what was observed at the time of the visit.

The following experts participated in the review of this school on March 28, 2012:

- Gabrielle Mosquera, Director of Oversight, NYC DOE CSAS
- Simeon Stolzberg, Consultant to NYC DOE CSAS

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<sup>1</sup> Self-reported on school's Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form (3/15/12)

<sup>2</sup> NYC DOE ATS system and charter agreement

<sup>3</sup> NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012; the school's self-reported numbers (3/15/12) are nearly identical to those from the ATS system pull: 88.8% students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (318 out of 358); 25.1% students who are English Language Learners (90 out of 358); and 20.4% special education students (73 out of 358).

<sup>4</sup> Self-reported on school's Annual Site Visit Data Collection Forms (6/7/2011 and 3/15/12)

<sup>5</sup> Self-reported on school's Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form (3/15/12)

<sup>6</sup> Self-reported on school's Annual Site Visit Data Collection Form (3/15/12)

<sup>7</sup> NYC DOE Progress Report webpage: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm>

<sup>8</sup> NYC DOE website: [http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2010-11/Survey\\_2011\\_M388.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/OA/SchoolReports/2010-11/Survey_2011_M388.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> New York State Education Department - [www.nysed.gov](http://www.nysed.gov)

## Part 2: Findings

### Areas of Strength:

- Classroom instruction observed on the day of the visit was always purposeful, often engaging and sometimes rigorous.
  - Observed lessons appeared purposeful and organized. Teachers had clear agendas and prepared materials. With state tests imminent, many lessons were designed to prepare students for the format and content of those exams. For example, an English teacher provided students with exemplars of different levels from a state test open-response question.
  - Students were consistently engaged in learning activities. Pacing was typically appropriate for the type of lessons, though some lessons seemed constrained by the 45-minute periods. Most teachers had effective classroom management techniques with clear procedures in place.
  - There was evidence that teachers are checking for understanding, including questioning, observation, and evaluation of student work. In a number of classes teachers explained that they were focusing on particular skills or topics because they had noticed a number of students struggling with them.
  - Some differentiation was observed, including use of leveled texts and challenge problems. A CTT class used parallel teaching to focus on the same material with different pacing and scaffolding. A 7<sup>th</sup> grade honors class has been formed that participates in a special high school prep program to prepare for the selective high school exams.
  
- TEP has established a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning.
  - On the day of the visit most students in observed classrooms were well-behaved and on task. Observed teachers had clear classroom management procedures in place (e.g., norms and routines for hand signals, selecting independent reading books, working collaboratively) that most students appeared to have internalized. Although the school being housed in trailers forces transitions between classes to be held outside, these were shown to be efficient, with silent lines enforced in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade while 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were permitted to talk quietly. Within observed classrooms students were respectful and attentive.
  - The school has refined its discipline system to include an in-school suspension program that is described by staff as more redemptive than punitive. Students are provided work and monitored by one of the school's social workers; all of the suspended student's teachers are expected to check in during the day and students complete a reflection assignment.
  - The school evidences a clear focus on character development. Many teachers observed on the day of the visit used praise to reinforce desired behaviors. The school holds weekly assemblies to celebrate student successes, and honor roll students receive special uniform shirts.
  
- The school has developed a professional culture that focuses on teacher responsibility, encourages collaboration (with an emphasis in the 2011-12 school year on teacher partnership), and is receptive to teacher input.
  - While the school had added to its administration team with the addition of an assistant principal position, part of each teacher's job description is "whole school service." Teachers also have significant input into the direction of the school; for example, results of teacher surveys were used to determine the school-wide focus on teacher partnership work. Additionally, teachers interviewed reported that they could create their own discipline incentives this year. As one teacher interviewed stated, "Leaders are open to initiatives. You need to run it past them, and it may or may not work, but people aren't afraid to try."

- While the school has very high expectations for teachers, new teachers noted significant orientation and ongoing support to help them thrive. Similarly, and partly in response to significant turnover midway through the previous school year, school leaders have refined their hiring practices and increased their focus on candidates who can demonstrate commitment for teaching in urban schools.
    - The school's current hiring process emphasizes commitment-based evidence such as the teacher's previous attendance record over its previous emphasis on self-reflective essays. This shift is supported by current staff. Said one interviewed teacher, "A TEP teacher need not be a genius, but does need to be able to stick it out."
    - Additionally, the hiring process now involves TEP teachers more directly than it had in previous years. All teachers are now invited to observe demo lessons by teacher candidates as well as participate in roundtable discussions with candidates to help determine fit. School leaders reported that approximately 8 teachers came to one candidate's demo lesson earlier in the year.
  - Professional development is driven primarily through teacher partnerships. Each quarter teachers are paired; partners observe each other twice per week and meet afterward to provide constructive feedback. This year the school has adopted school-wide foci for partnerships, including vocabulary development and listening skills.
    - Teachers interviewed praised the partnership model. Several special subject teachers stated that it positively challenged them to learn to teach outside of their content areas. Another teacher stated that the partnerships "force you out of the isolation of teaching."
  - Regular meetings to address teaching and learning issues are held for faculty, grade teams and departments.
  - Formal evaluations are conducted at least twice per year and focus on five domains. Teachers interviewed appreciated the feedback garnered from these and described it as focused and actionable. Informal feedback was similarly praised. One teacher interviewed stated that while it was initially startling to have so many people coming in and out of the classroom, "It never feels judgmental. Zeke always points out things that are concise and actionable." Another teacher stated that school leaders encouraged him to "make a lot of small fixes, but it adds up."
  - Teachers interviewed praised the school's level of administrative support and resources as well as the efficiency and professionalism of its operations team. Classroom libraries and technology were evident throughout the school.
- The school collects a significant amount of assessment data and regularly analyzes results to identify students in need of remediation and skills and topics for re-teaching.
    - The school administers four "cycle" exams modeled on previous state tests, amending these this year to better reflect the stamina needed for students taking the state exams. According to school leaders, after each cycle learning specialists target students who scored in the 60- to 70-percent range (which the school forecasts as the equivalent of high 2s to low 3s), and are responsible for analyzing this data and using it to modify instructional practices.
    - TEP introduced a new literacy assessment, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), which is administered quarterly and used to track student progress.
    - An explicit goal-setting process is in place for teachers and used as part of professional development and evaluation. Some goals are set by individual teachers and others are school-wide.
  - The school has strong support from its key stakeholders, as evidenced by several measures including (but not limited to) the NYC DOE School Survey.
    - The school's 2009-10 and 2010-11 NYC DOE School Survey participation rates were extremely high among parents, students, and teachers. In 2009-10, 93 percent of parents and 100 percent of teachers participated (students were not eligible to participate as 5<sup>th</sup> graders), and the 2010-11 survey had 99 percent parent participation, 100 percent

teacher participation, and 100 percent student participation. Scores across all four survey areas (Academic Expectations, Communication, Engagement, and Safety & Respect) were also very high, with an 8.1 (out of a possible 10) being the lowest score in an individual category across both years.

- Teachers and other staff members interviewed on the day of the visit consistently voiced support for the school, not only with regard to the professional development and attention they receive but also for the school's mission and initiatives.
  - School leaders report that TEP's Parent Association has been instrumental this year in helping resolve school community issues such as securing enough MTA buses to transport students to and from school.
- TEP serves a comparable at-risk population to CSD 6: the school's percentages of special education and Free or Reduced Price Lunch students exceed those of the district. TEP's student body has 20.4% special education students compared to 13.9%, and it has 89.1% Free or Reduced Price Lunch students compared to the district average of 80.2%. Its ELL population is high (25.1%) but below the district's (33.4%)<sup>10</sup>.
    - TEP should continue to should its efforts to be in full compliance with the 2010 amended Charter Schools Act as it relates to recruitment and retention of Special Education students, students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, and ELL students. School leaders stated an intention to add a lottery carve-out for ELLs during its next charter term, and its current recruitment and lottery materials are translated into Spanish. The school is encouraged to continue documenting both its outreach to new ELL students as well as the academic progress made among current ELLs.

#### **Areas of Growth:**

- The school should continue its efforts to improve the level and consistency of instructional rigor across classrooms and to develop and align its curriculum program across grades in order to continue to improve its academic results and make progress in meeting its charter goals.
  - TEP's overall NYS Math and ELA increased from 2010 to 2011 but were mixed in comparison with CSD 6, above CSD 6 in Grade 5 Math and ELA but below in Grade 6 Math and ELA. Both grade levels in both subjects were below citywide 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency averages.
  - The level of instructional rigor in observed classrooms ranged from adequate to strong. Some teachers had very effective questioning techniques, asking students to clarify or explain their answers, cite text, or make connections. A few teachers were particularly good at using wait time and guiding questions to help students develop answers, while other teachers moved quickly to other students when one struggled to answer.
  - Teachers continue to be responsible for curriculum development in their grade and subject. As the school has expanded into new grades the subject area departments are becoming more organized with regular meetings and opportunities to vertically align curriculum. However, teacher turnover has limited the departments' ability to cohere and staff acknowledged that curriculum alignment is a work in progress. The school is considering identifying teacher leaders to provide more direction to departments in their development of curriculum and instruction.
  - The school has focused considerable attention this year on developing reading instruction across the curriculum, but acknowledged that a coherent writing program is not yet in place.
  - There is some evidence of curriculum integration across subject areas, but beyond the reading across the curriculum initiative it appears to be informal. For example, the 6<sup>th</sup> grade has a two-block integrated humanities (English and social studies) class, but it is a function of individual staffing preference rather than a school-wide design feature.

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<sup>10</sup> NYC DOE ATS System, April 2012

- While the school devotes resources to meeting the needs of at-risk students, it should consider more explicitly monitoring the performance of sub-groups and targeting interventions for them.
  - The school has recently developed reading and mathematics support classes for students performing in the bottom 20 percent according to state test results. A large number of staff members, regardless of subject area, are participating in these classes, allowing for small student-to-teacher ratios. However, it was unclear how the progress of this group was being gauged throughout the year, or to what degree the needs of students within this group were being differentiated.
  - The school had collaborative team teaching (CTT) at each grade in mathematics and English language arts. Some other general education teachers noted their own limited experience in working with at-risk students and stated that they would benefit from additional training in this area.
  - While the school is piloting a tutoring program for very low performing students and is about to launch an online tutoring program, the structure for these initiatives as well as their integration into the school's overall academic supports are still developing.
  - The school has a large population of English language learners, but strategies employed to reach them within the general education classroom appear to be limited. While different level ELL students are grouped in reading support classes, it was not evident that this supplemental instruction was specifically designed to meet their needs or support their success in the regular classroom. The school is examining the curriculum of its reading support program and considering alternatives. The school should continue this work and carefully monitor the results of different interventions so that the needs of these students are effectively addressed.
  
- The school should consider strategies for enhancing its analysis of student performance data as well as its role in driving programmatic decisions.
  - Although considerable analysis of student performance data is evident, disaggregation by sub-group does not appear to be driving implementation, evaluation and modification of programs and services for at-risk students.
  - At the time of the visit there was limited evidence of the school examining the predictive power of its assessment data with regards to external accountability measures. As more results from the school's modified and new assessments become available the school should continue to use them to evaluate teachers, programs, and interventions.

## Part 3: Essential Questions and Accountability Framework

### The CSAS Accountability Framework

To help NYC DOE authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the NYC DOE's Charter Schools Accountability and Support team (CSAS) has developed an Accountability Framework build around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

1. Is the school an academic success?
2. Is the school a fiscally sound, viable organization?
3. Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?
4. What are the school's plans for its next charter term?

## 1. Is the School an Academic Success?

### 1a. High Academic Attainment and Improvement

Schools that are academic successes have many of the characteristics below:

- Meet absolute performance goals established in school charter
- Meet student progress goals established in school charter
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing performance of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing performance district and city proficiency or better averages
- Are meeting other rigorous academic and non-academic goals as stated in school's charter

Evidence for success might include, but not be limited to, the following depending on school configurations:

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute performance, individual student progress, comparative performance to similar schools, home district or city averages, progress for at-risk populations)
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates (absolute and progress, overall, for at-risk student populations)
- Grades 8-12 College Readiness Credit Accumulation
- Percentage of Students Applying to and Being Admitted to College
- Percentage of Students Taking AP Courses and/or Percentage of Students Passing AP Courses
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic and Non-Academic Goals
- NYC Progress Reports

### 1b. Mission and Academic Goals

Schools with successful missions and goals have many of the characteristics below:

- Have an animating mission statement that staff, students and community embrace
- Set ambitious academic and non-academic goals that entire school community knows and embraces
- Have processes for regular monitoring and reporting on progress toward school goals

- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

Evidence for successful missions and goals might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Mission statement, charter, external documents (parent and family handbooks, school website, etc.)
- Annual reports, school improvement plans, leadership board reports
- Board agendas and minutes
- Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys
- Parent association meeting agendas and minutes
- Participation at parent-teacher conferences, school advocacy events, participation in academic goal related programs
- Stakeholder (board, parents, staff, students, etc.) interviews

### **1c. Responsive Education Program**

Schools with successful education programs have many of the characteristics below:

- Are self-reflective and examine practice based on outcomes against goals
- Have well-thought out curricular programs that are aligned with NYS learning outcomes as described by state standards and the new Common Core Curriculum.
- Use instructional models and resources consistent with school mission and that are flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Implement a coherent and effective interim assessment system (e.g., use of formative, interim, and summative assessment data) for monitoring progress, predicting performance, and adjusting instruction
- Have an effective process for supporting improved classroom instruction, including frequent observation and feedback
- Use a defined process for evaluating curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals
- Have school calendars and day schedules that provide the time necessary to deliver on the school's mission and academic goals

Evidence for successful education programs, in addition to positive results, may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- Instructional planning documents (alignments, scope and sequences, curriculum maps, unit and lesson plans, etc)
- Student/teacher schedules
- Classroom observations
- Student Intervention / Response to Intervention program description and resources
- Special Education/ELL progress monitoring documentation
- Interim assessment results
- Student and teacher portfolios
- Data findings; adjusted lesson plans
- Self-assessment documentation
- Professional development plans and resources
- School calendar and daily schedules
- DOE School Surveys and internal school satisfaction surveys
- Instructional leader and staff interviews

## 1d. Learning Environment

Schools with successful learning environments have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a strong academic culture that creates high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to consistently give their best efforts
- Use a comprehensive approach to student management, including positive behavioral expectations and a clear discipline policy to build and sustain a safe, orderly, and supportive classroom environment
- Provide for safe, respectful, efficient transitions, hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Provide opportunities for students to actively engage in their own learning and in the life of the school
- Have a plan with formal or informal structures or programs in place that provide students opportunities to develop as individuals and citizens (for example: a character education, citizenship, or community involvement or service program)

Evidence for successful learning environments may include, but not be limited to, many of the following:

- School mission and articulated values
- School calendar and class schedules
- Student management plan (code of conduct, school values, discipline policy, positive incentive system, etc.)
- Student attendance and retention rates
- Student discipline data (referral, suspension, expulsion)
- DOE School Survey student results
- DOE School Survey parent and teacher safety and respect results
- Parent complaint/concern information
- Internal satisfaction survey results
- Leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, student interviews
- Classroom observations
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)

## 2. Is the School a Fiscally Sound, Viable Organization?

### 2a. Governance Structure and Organizational Design

Schools with successful governance and organizational design structures have many of the characteristics below:

- Have a clearly articulated governance structure, compliant with its charter and all applicable laws and regulations, with clear lines of accountability for the Board, school leadership and all staff
- Have a capable Board of Trustees with appropriate officers, committees, and a purposeful blend of skills and experiences to provide oversight and strategic direction to fulfill the mission and goals of its charter
- Have a Board that is fully compliant with all applicable laws and regulations, particularly but not limited to open-meeting laws and conflict of interest regulations, and is fully compliant with its Board approved by-laws (number of meetings, quorum, posting of calendar, agenda and minutes)
- Have a defined process for Board reflection on effectiveness, assessing developing needs, and plan

for professional growth

- Have developed a succession plan for board and school leadership, consistent with the charter and Board by-laws, to ensure continuity of direction and leadership over time and despite circumstance
- Implements a school leadership structure that is aligned with charter and that is sufficient to fulfill school's mission and achieve its accountability goals and, if and when necessary, makes timely adjustments to that structure with proper notice to and approval by its authorizer
- If applicable, school relationship with a charter management organization is identified in charter and supported by a management agreement that spells out services, responsibilities, accountability reporting, performance expectations, and fees
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Implements a process for recruiting, hiring, compensating, monitoring, and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's staff that is clearly defined in staff handbook
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provide regular feedback on instruction to teachers, including both formal and informal observations

Evidence for school governance and organizational design may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- School charter
- Board by-laws, roster, trustee resumes, calendar of meetings, meeting agenda and minutes
- Annual conflict of interest forms
- Board resources for evaluating school leadership and staff, including rubric/performance metrics
- Board resources for self-reflection and professional growth
- Board development plan
- Board interviews
- Staff roster, job descriptions, staff handbook, operations manual
- School calendar
- Professional development plan for leadership staff
- School leadership and staff interviews

## **2b. School Climate and Community Engagement**

Schools with a sustaining school climate and engaged parent and community support have many of the characteristics below:

- Create and maintain a healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student centered, and aligned with school mission and values
- Implement flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- Encourage professional conversations about effective performance and quality instruction among staff, through, for example, such means as regular and periodic teaming (grade level teams, data days, etc.) and peer observations
- Have systems in place to evaluate professional development effectiveness and provide ongoing support for school-wide and individual initiatives
- Employ an effective means of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including, but not limited to, the DOE School Survey
- Have effective home-school communication practices and engagement strategies to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Engage parents actively in the life of the school, including advocacy, community engagement, and feedback on school policies and initiatives
- Develop strong community-based partnerships who support and advocate for the school

- Have a clear procedure for parents and staff to express concerns to school leadership and the Board, as appropriate, including a clearly articulated escalation path to authorizer

Evidence for school climate and community engagement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Internal satisfaction surveys
- Staff handbook
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- School Professional Development Plan and staff feedback on professional development events
- Resources for evaluations and observations, scheduled opportunities for professional collaboration, staff feedback on professional development events
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent/Student Handbook
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs
- Parent and community feedback via public hearings, renewal calls to parents, etc.
- Community outreach documents (newsletters, announcements, invitations, etc.)

## **2c. Financial and Operational Health**

Schools that are responsible stewards of public funds and effective, sustaining organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- Consistently meet student enrollment and retention targets
- Maintain annual budgets that meet all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- Provide rigorous oversight of financial and operational responsibilities, as school leadership and Board levels, in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to short- and long-term decision-making
- Have clearly established policies and procedures for overall fiscal and operational health of the school (onboarding of all new staff, record-keeping, processing requests of HR services, application and enrollment calls, visitors, volunteers, etc.)
- Maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- Receive consistently clean financial audits
- If applicable, have strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of charter school design and academic program
- Ensure a safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations
- Have appropriate insurance coverage

Evidence for a financially sound, viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School budget, P&Ls, and monthly/quarterly cash-flow reports
- Financial leader(s) job description, resume and accountability documents
- Financial and operational organizational chart
- Financial audits
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) for significant partnerships and vendor relationships
- Operational policies and procedures, including training resources
- Staff turnover and retention records
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- School safety plan
- Appropriate insurance documents

### **3. Is the School in Compliance with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?**

#### **3a. Approved Charter and Agreement**

Schools in substantial compliance with their charter and agreement have:

- Implemented the key features of their charter as described in the original charter and, if appropriate, as modified in approved revisions to their charter, including but not limited to mission, academic program, school organization, grade configuration, enrollment, goals, etc.
- Ensure that up-to-date charter is available on request to staff, parents, and school community
- Implemented comprehensive academic, behavioral, oversight, management, and operational policies and procedures that are substantially aligned with the charter and the school's stated mission and vision

Evidence for a school's compliance with the terms of its charter and charter agreement may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Authorized charter and signed agreement
- Charter revision request approval and documentation
- School mission
- School policies and procedures
- Annual Site Visit reports
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership, Board, staff and community interviews
- Public hearings (renewal or material revision hearings)

#### **3b. Applicable Federal and State Law**

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law:

- Meet all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting

- Meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets for FRL, ELL and Special Education students to those of their district of location<sup>11</sup> or are making documented good faith efforts to reach comparable percentages for enrollment and retention
- Implement school policies related to student discipline and promotion and retention that are fully compliant with laws and regulations related to students with disabilities and due process regulations
- Conduct an independently verified fair and open lottery and manage with integrity enrollment process and annual waiting lists
- Employ instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and certification requirements

Evidence for compliance with applicable federal and state law may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School reporting documents
- School's Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Family/Student handbook
- Student discipline records
- Parent complaint/grievance records
- Lottery policy, resources, and records; enrollment procedures and records
- Demographic data (school, district, and other as appropriate)
- Staff roster, fingerprint clearance for all staff, certification status of all instructional staff

### **3c. Applicable Regulations**

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns with applicable regulations
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and have completed all other financial reporting as required
- Boards that meet requirements for size, meeting frequency, public notice, applicable open-meeting and conflict of interest regulations, as well as complying with NYC DOE CSAS's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members.
- Informed NYC DOE CSAS, and where required, received CSAS approval for changes in significant partnerships, such as dropping/replacing a management organization
- Effectively engaged parent associations

Evidence for compliance with applicable regulations may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- School or building safety plan; appropriate inspection documents
- Annual audits, escrow accounts, other financial reporting documents
- Board roster, calendar, agenda and minutes, conflict of interest documents, notification of changes/approval of new member request documents
- Charter revision requests, revised or new contracts
- Parent association calendar of meetings, identified officers, parent association agenda and minutes, parent satisfaction survey results
- Interviews with Board, staff, parents, students or others, as appropriate

<sup>11</sup> School-specific targets for enrollment and retention are to come from NY State Education Department

## 4. What Are the School's Plans for its Next Charter Term?

### 4a. School Expansion or Model Replication

In anticipation of a new charter term schools may be considering various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment or altering their model in some significant way. Successful schools generally have processes for:

- Conducting needs/opportunity assessments
- Forming Board and leadership committees or subcommittees to investigate options, develop action plans, ensure capacity and resources are aligned, etc.
- Engaging school community in articulating charter revisions (or a new charter in cases of replication) to address the proposed growth plans
- Ensuring that the final proposal is ambitious but realistic in its plans
- Creating a well-reasoned and documented prospective for the school's new charter term and, if applicable, a new charter proposal (for replication)

Evidence for likely success in planning for school growth in a new charter term may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Charter (replication) Application
- Leadership and Board interviews

### 4b. Organizational Sustainability

Successful schools consistently perform despite change. While there is no single path for ensuring sustainability, successful schools often have the following features:

- School anticipates organizational opportunities/needs and plans for resource development (human resource policies for growing your own talent, for example, or fundraising or budget management to take care of anticipated capital needs and to mitigate risks for the unexpected, or board development to bring new talent or specific needs-based expertise to the school)

Evidence for organizational sustainability may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organization chart
- Staff rosters
- Staff handbook
- Leadership and staff interviews
- Budget

#### **4c. School or Model Improvements**

Successful schools are thoughtful about the continued appropriateness of school design features and elements of their models. They:

- Review performance carefully and even if they don't make major changes through expansion or replication, they are careful to adjust elements to ensure continued and improved success.
- Develop plans to improve the school learning environment, including improving their facilities to expand program offerings and/or developing new partnerships to further the school's mission.

Evidence for successful improvements to a school's program or model may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Renewal application narrative, including performance results and analyses of the current charter term
- Renewal application revised charter submission, including mission, program description, governance, organization, budget, etc. for new term
- Leadership and board interviews
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) with partners or important vendors