



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

**CHALLENGE PREP CHARTER SCHOOL
ANNUAL SITE VISIT REPORT**

MAY 2012

Part 1: Executive Summary

School Overview and History:

Challenge Prep Charter School is a K-5 school currently serving approximately 207 students in Kindergarten through grade 2.¹ The school opened in 2010 and is under the terms of its first charter. The school is projected to expand to K-5 during its current term, which is up for renewal during the 2014-2015 school year. If approved for renewal, the school is projected to reach its full grade span, K-8, during the 2017-2018 school year.

The school was temporarily co-located with Goldie Maple Academy (Q333) beginning in 2010, but moved to a private facility on 710 Hartman Lane in April 2012. Both facilities are in District 27 in Far Rockaway. According to an ATS data pull in April 2012, the student body includes 81.6% Free and Reduced Lunch, compared to 69.6% in the district, 7.3% special education students compared to 13.9% in the district, and 3.4% English language learners compared to 9.4% in the district.² Student attendance for the 2011-12 school year to date at the time of the visit was reported by the school to be 93.9%.³

Challenge Prep is currently in its second year of operation. LaToiya Tolliver-Revel is the second school principal and has served in this capacity since October 2010. The school has not yet received a Progress Report or state test results. All of the school's academic charter goals in 2010-11 were met. The school's 2010-2011 NYC DOE School Survey results were positive, with above average scores in Academic Expectations and Safety & Respect and well above average scores on Communication and Engagement.

Challenge Prep is an independent charter school not associated with a charter management organization (CMO).

Annual Review Process Overview:

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) Charter Schools Accountability and Support (CSAS) team 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 May 16th, 2012:

- Jessica Fredston-Hermann, Analyst, NYC DOE CSAS
- Debra Schwartzman, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSAS
- Rick Larios, Senior Director, NYC DOE CSAS

¹ Self-reported on school's ASV Data Collection Sheet (5/15/12)

² NYC DOE ATS system; the school's self-reported (5/15/12) numbers for special education was slightly lower than the ATS data pull: 6.7% (14 out of 207) for special education students, with two pending referrals.

³ Self-reported on school's ASV Data Collection Sheet (5/15/12)

Part 2: Findings

Areas of Strength

- The school has a strong, standards-based approach to teaching and learning, and its internal assessments indicate significant student progress.
 - Teachers follow a clear, consistent planning approach with some flexibility around the format of lesson plans.
 - Reviewers on the day of the visit noted data binders and lesson plan binders in every classroom. Objectives were posted with the corresponding standard noted; objectives were consistent across classrooms in the same grade level, indicating evidence of grade-level planning.
 - The school met all of its charter goals last year and, as of the time of the visit, the school had met or exceeded its mid-year goals for student proficiency as measured by DIBELS, Reading 3D, and Pearson Envision assessments.
- The school has a positive, respectful, and resource-rich learning environment.
 - Classrooms are safe, orderly, and print-rich. Word walls, student work (connected with tasks and rubrics), learning objectives, and classroom rules are displayed in each room.
 - Teachers were observed using new Promethean boards, and interviewed teachers noted that they have loved having the opportunity to integrate new technology in the classrooms (as this was a big shift from the year prior).
 - The school has recently moved into a new private facility with a dedicated gym and nursing office. At the time of the visit (approximately one month after the move) the school's facility was observed to be clean, spacious, and filled with examples of student work.
- The school has developed a strong, collegial professional learning community with multiple leadership and development opportunities for staff.
 - Both teachers and administration attend frequent professional development sessions. Professional development is built into the daily schedule and includes time for lesson planning, grade-level collaboration, and turnkeying information from outside PD sessions. Recent external professional development opportunities have included trainings on Universal Design for Learning (UdL), Response to Intervention (Rtl), and conducting effective walkthroughs using an iPad.
 - The school had 0% teacher turnover last year and expects similarly low numbers this year. Teachers interviewed described the school as “one big happy family” and reiterated their commitment to the students and fellow staff.
 - All staff members, including teachers, hold leadership roles in specific committees at the school. These committees allow teachers to play an active part in planning the lottery, breakfasts, the Reading Recovery program, and fun events through the school's Sunshine Committee.
 - Interviewed teachers spoke about frequent collaboration and sharing resources with each other, even those outside of grade levels – one teacher stated that “we are all in it together.”
 - Teachers are actively involved in the hiring process and are given input about which grade levels they would like to teach and whether they would prefer to “loop” by moving up with their students.
 - Classroom observations are frequent and are conducted by the school principal, teacher leaders, and peers. Two teachers have already been certified as peer coaches and two were currently in training at the time of the visit. Two members of the leadership team were currently in the process of being certified as Danielson observers at the time of the site visit.

- Interviewed teachers noted that the principal's "door is always open." Teachers described feedback as helpful and noted that the principal is in classrooms every day. They also reported that they appreciated the support of the lead teachers at the school.
- The school has developed a mentorship program for new teachers in which they are paired with more veteran teachers. The school plans to continue this structure next year since they will be staffing up with a significant number of new teachers.
- Teachers interviewed appeared to "own" the school culture and high expectations. When asked about the challenges of the mid-year move to a new facility or next year's grade expansion, teachers expressed only positivity and enthusiasm about serving their students and community as well as possible.
- School leadership has made a point of visiting other schools to share best practices, including as part of Metamorphosis training as well as the Partnership for Innovation in Compensation for Charter Schools (PICCS) collaboration. The school is partnered with the Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association (CEI-PEA) and the NYU Metro Learning Center which provide additional support.
- The school has a stable, self-reflective leadership team committed to its mission and to making adjustments as needed.
 - The school added Trait Crate to their writing program this year in response to teacher input that the school needed a stronger focus on writing.
 - The school has made changes to its assessment program this year, adding Reading 3D, Pearson Envision, and TerraNova.
 - The school will be taking in an additional 144 students next year, with new students in each grade level. To prepare for the influx of students, the school has planned a Kindergarten Playdate in June as well as orientation for 1st through 3rd graders and a "boot camp" for the 3rd graders who may be the most academically behind, which includes time for diagnostic assessments. The school, as noted above, also plans to continue the mentorship model for new teachers next year.
- The school is committed to meeting the needs of all learners through a variety of intervention options.
 - Push-in support is provided by the ESL teacher, the SPED teacher, specialty teachers, the reading specialist, and the guidance counselor. Twelve teachers are trained in the Reading Rescue program, which is used to work with students one-on-one. Ten students tested out of the program in January and were replaced by other students in need of extra support.
 - 35 students participate in social skills groups with the school guidance counselor. The guidance counselor also pushes into classrooms and teaches character lessons once a month.
 - Several lesson plans observed on the day of the visit contained directions for guided reading groups at three different levels with three different sets of questions to ask each group. In these classrooms, students benefited from the presence of multiple adults to differentiate content and questioning more effectively.
 - The Child Study team and the RtI team, which is new this year, both meet regularly and provide additional support by focusing on interventions (academic and behavioral) for individual students. According to school leadership, the school has seen a decrease in the number of students being held back and a decrease in the number of students struggling behaviorally this year, which they attribute partially to the support of these teams.
 - The school adopted the Reading 3D program this year in order to give teachers a more complete picture of students' reading comprehension levels so that interventions may be planned more efficiently.
 - ELL students may receive additional homework support through a partnership with the local library.
 - The school is considering introducing mandatory afterschool and Saturday school to provide additional support to students.

- The school has a strong, coherent assessment program and collects a variety of data that is used to inform instruction and intervention.
 - Students take the TerraNova twice a year for baseline data, as well as DIBELS, Pearson Envision, and Reading 3D assessments.
 - Teachers interviewed described how they use DIBELS data not just to see that a student is “struggling,” but to determine specific areas of strength and growth, group students accordingly, and identify topics for re-teaching.
 - The PICCS grant has given the school access to additional data-tracking tools, as well as the opportunity to collaborate with other schools. The Performance Plus program allows the school to create their own assessments and upload results online that are accessible to all teachers. The school also has a school-wide data binder that includes results from TerraNova, Reading 3D, and other forms of assessment.
 - The school has begun using TeacherEase, which both parents and teachers have access to. Teachers described the program as “useful” and “timely” for importing grades.

- The school has developed clear channels for parent communication, and parental involvement appears high.
 - The Parent Association is active and attendance levels at meetings were reported to be high. The school continues to elect Class Parents, who meet with the principal and social worker once a month, and to send home daily Parent Communication Notebooks. Observed notebooks contained notes about students’ academic and behavioral performance in class, with some questions and comments in response from parents. Parents are also asked to oversee students’ completion of nightly reading logs.
 - The school has adopted the Home Connection program this year which gives parents access to their children’s benchmark scores and information about their strengths and weaknesses in clear, understandable language. In addition, parents have access to view all of their students’ assessments on Teacher Ease. Unit exams and spelling tests are sent home, as are print-outs of students’ DIBELS results.
 - Parents are invited to Rtl meetings and involved in setting goals for their children.
 - On the day of the visit parents were observed to be volunteering in classrooms.
 - The school introduced Family Reading Nights this year, which were described by leadership as a “huge success.” Students were given bags of books and teachers discussed reading strategies to use at home (e.g. making inferences).
 - Parent scores on the 2010-11 NYC DOE School Survey were high (9.0 or above in all four categories), with 68% of parents responding.
 - The school has also developed strong community ties and the community has responded with interest; as of the time of the visit, over 400 students remained on the waitlist after the lottery. Leadership noted that parents were “really helpful” during their move to a new facility this year.

- As an organization, the school is currently fiscally sound and operationally responsible.
 - The budget is tight this year because of the move to a private facility, but the school has thoughtfully made contingency plans for its future and anticipates more flexibility next year because of the increased enrollment—while there will be a corresponding increase in staffing and curriculum materials the rent of the facility will not be going up in response to increased space usage.
 - The school has a full-time operations director and contracts with Charter School Business Management (CSBM) for fiscal and human resources processes.
 - Staff satisfaction seems high and teacher results on the 2010-11 NYC DOE School Survey were largely positive, although only 35% of teachers participated. Staff retention has been high with 0% of teachers leaving last year.

Areas of Growth

- As was noted in the 2011 site visit report, the school should continue to focus on developing strategies for increasing student involvement in class responses and checking student understanding in classrooms.
 - While students were consistently on task in completing assignments, in observed classrooms only a limited number of students responded to teacher questioning. As a result, it was unclear in any given instance that all students understood the material. On occasions when only a few hands rose in response to teachers' questions no effort was made to encourage more responders or to check responses of those who didn't raise their hands—thumbs up or down if you agree/disagree, for example. When wrong or incomplete responses were given some teachers did not clearly note the errors before moving on to another respondent or follow up to check that the student who got an answer wrong now understood the correct answer.
 - In a number of classrooms, teachers gave students the right answer without explaining why or did not follow up on student misunderstandings to verify that 100% of students understood.
 - On the day of the visit, reviewers noted that instruction was primarily directed toward the whole class. Reviewers did not observe many small groups or opportunities for student voice.
 - Pacing was slow in some classrooms observed, with teachers spending a long time on review and students beginning to fidget or otherwise disengage. The school is encouraged to focus on developing strategies for tighter pacing so that more students are actively engaged in the material at all times.
 - The school may want to consider focusing on more flexible questioning and discussion strategies in order to actively involve more students in responding to questions and demonstrating understanding, including adding whole-class checks for understanding and other appropriate strategies to verify student understanding during lessons (e.g. thumbs up/down, think/pair/share, turn and talks, whiteboards, etc.).
- The school is encouraged to focus on clarifying expectations and holding students accountable for high-quality, rigorous work.
 - Directions were not always delivered clearly in some observed classrooms – students were not all working on the same page or in the same section, and the transitions between tasks or different parts of the lesson were sometimes smooth and efficient and sometimes not.
 - In some lessons, lesson time was lost as students took a long time completing simple tasks, such as selecting a book or writing a heading. In one lesson observed, about half of the class was left without any activity to complete while the other half took a significant amount of time to copy a definition from the board. The school is encouraged to consider focusing on teacher pacing as well as holding students accountable for their own learning.
 - While red/yellow/green behavior charters were consistently posted in classrooms and there was evidence of consistent expectations for student behaviors, implementation varied with different teachers, evidenced by varying levels of compliance from students and follow-up by teachers. In most classrooms observed, students were generally seated, quiet, and attentive. In several classrooms observed, however, students were off-task and did not change behavior in response to teacher directions (e.g. "I need everyone to sit in magic 5 now").
- The school should continue to consider ways to improve the effectiveness of multiple adults in the classroom, and different strategies that may be used to fully employ adults more effectively.
 - While reviewers did note evidence of small-group instruction in lesson plans, the preponderance of whole group instruction in the observed classrooms resulted in missed opportunities for one-on-one interventions or small group reteaches while TAs, push-in

teachers, and parent volunteers were watching and waiting. During lessons with extended direct instruction parts, the school should consider how to best use the presence of multiple adults in order to meet the needs of all students—it could mean sharing instruction in various ways or assigning the additional adults to groups or individuals to verify learning during a check for understanding, and the like.

- As the school grows, it is encouraged to continue focusing on the sustainability of its culture and staff.
 - The school will have a major “growth spurt” next year with 144 new students and a large number of new staff members. The school should continue focusing on strategies to orient new students and teachers to school culture while maintaining high satisfaction levels among current students and staff, monitoring the effectiveness of its planned strategies, and making adjustments as warranted.
 - The school has thoughtfully planned to add an additional instructional leadership position next year to better support teachers and assist with observations.
 - The operations team currently receives support through a number of volunteers, but the school may need to consider institutionalizing operational support in the future.
 - The school leadership should continue to monitor the impact of expenses related to the move into the private facility on their budget and work with its board and CSBM to develop strategies for strengthening its long term financial position.
- The school should continue to enact measures 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 Lunch, and ELL students.
 - The school’s percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch is currently higher than the district’s, while the percentages of special education students and English language learners are lower.⁴
 - According to leadership, the school did a lot of research on demographics in the district and conducted more thorough outreach this year including at Hispanic centers and daycares. They expect their ELL population to increase slightly this year. The school is encouraged to continue these efforts and documenting their outreach to both ELL and SPED communities.

⁴ NYC DOE ATS system, April 2012

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 (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 location⁵ 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

⁵ 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