



**NEW YORK CENTER FOR AUTISM CHARTER SCHOOL  
RENEWAL REPORT**

**2014 – 2015 SCHOOL YEAR  
JUNE 2015**

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## Part 1: Summary of Renewal Recommendation

### I. Charter School Overview:

#### Background Information

New York Center for Autism Charter School	
Board Chair(s)	Nancy Needle
School Leader(s)	Julie Fisher
Charter Management Organization (if applicable)	N/A
Other Partner(s)	N/A
District(s) of Location	NYC Community School District 4
Physical Address(es)	433 East 100 Street, Manhattan
Facility Owner(s)	DOE
School Opened For Instruction	2005-2006
Current Charter Term Expiration Date	4/14/2015
Current Authorized Grade Span	Ungraded, serves students aged 5-19
Current Authorized Enrollment	32
Proposed New Charter Term	0.2 years [April 15, 2015 – June 30, 2015] 5 years [July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2020]
Proposed Authorized Grade Span for New Charter Term	Ungraded, serves students aged 5-21
Proposed Authorized Enrollment for New Charter Term	40
Proposed Sections per Grade for New Charter Term	N/A

## Overview of School-Specific Data

### School Evaluation of Academic Goals as stated in Annual Report to NYSED and Renewal Application to NYC DOE

Academic Goal Analysis					
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	Cumulative Charter Term Total
Total Achievable Goals	4	4	4	4	16
# Met	3	4	4	4	15
# Partially Met	0	0	0	0	0
# Not Met	0	0	0	0	0
# Not Applicable *	1	0	0	0	1
% Met	75%	100%	100%	100%	94%
% Partially Met	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Not Met	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Not Applicable *	25%	0%	0%	0%	6%
% Met of All Applicable Goals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

\* Some goals may not be applicable in all years. For example, goals related to the NYC Progress Report are not applicable for the 2013-2014 school year as Progress Reports were not issued that year.

### School Evaluation of Student Performance and Progress<sup>1</sup>

Academic Performance Analysis					
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	Charter Term Average
Percent of Student IEP Objectives Mastered	77%	84%	88%	91%	85%
Percent of Students Progressing*	100%	100%	94%	93%	97%

\* Reflects students whose performance improved between administrations of an informal assessment of linguistic and functional behaviors, as measured by the Assessment of Functional Living Skills, the Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, or the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales.

<sup>1</sup> School reported information collected as part of the Renewal Application dated December 2014.

### Students scoring at or above Level 3 on NYS Alternative Assessments

% Proficient on NYS Alternative Assessments					
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	Charter Term Average
English Language Arts	100.0%	100.0%	94.7%	90.0%	96.2%
Math	100.0%	100.0%	89.5%	95.0%	96.1%
Science <sup>2</sup>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0% <sup>3</sup>	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>2</sup> The majority of students at New York Center for Autism Charter School do not take the NYSAA Science exam; in any given year, 24% or fewer of the school's students took the exam

<sup>3</sup> The number of students who took the NYSAA Science exam in 2012-2013 does not meet the minimum threshold for results to be considered significant. Given the unreliability of measurements based on small numbers, the minimum number of students is five for student sample-size criteria to be met.

## II. Renewal Recommendation and Rationale

Based on the evidence presented herein and detailed below in Part II, the NYC DOE recommends a 5 year full-term renewal.

To address the gap between April 15, 2015 and June 30, 2015, the NYCDOE further recommends a short-term renewal to “right-size” the charter term for this school. This short-term renewal will be in effect from April 15, 2015 through June 30, 2015, at which point the 5 year full-term renewal will go into effect with a charter expiration date of June 30, 2020.

As part of the renewal application, New York Center for Autism Charter School submitted two material revisions. The NYC DOE determinations are as follows: regarding the material revision to increase the authorized maximum enrollment to 40 students during the next charter term, the NYC DOE approves this material revision. Regarding the material revision to increase the age range of students served at the school from ages five to 19 to ages five to 21, the NYC DOE approves this material revision.

### A. Academic Performance

At the time of this school’s renewal, New York Center for Autism Charter School has demonstrated academic success.

#### **New York Charter Schools Act**

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 establishes a system of charter schools throughout New York State, with objectives that include:

#### **§ 2850 (2)**

- (a) Improve student learning and achievement;
- (b) Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- (c) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- (d) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- (e) Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and
- (f) Provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems by holding the schools established under this article accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

Data available for New York Center for Autism Charter School indicates that the school has made progress towards meeting all of these objectives.

#### **Mission and Vision**

The New York Center for Autism Charter School is dedicated to defining best practices for the public school education of children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. The school executes against this mission by providing an intensive, year-round individualized education program based on the principals of applied behavior analysis (ABA). The school is ungraded, and serves students from all five boroughs in New York City. The school provides direct one-on-one instruction, year-round, to students on the Autism Spectrum Disorder, and focuses on instruction that will ultimately prepare students for the world beyond the school.

As a lab school, the New York Center for Autism Charter School is dedicated to disseminating best practices and increasing awareness of Autism beyond the school. The school currently serves 32 students between the ages of five and 19 in eight ungraded classes with an average class size of four students and four adults in each classroom, though this may vary based on the mandated ratio in each student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### **School Specific Academic Performance**

The New York Center for Autism Charter School entered its tenth year of operation with the 2014-2015 academic year. The school was last renewed in April 2010; given the timing of student assessments, the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) has only four full years (school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014) of academic data, such as data obtained through internal assessments and attendance information, to evaluate the academic achievement and progress of the students at New York Center for Autism Charter School during the retrospective charter term. Given the school's unique model and student population, the school's students do not take the New York State (NYS) English Language Arts (ELA) or math assessments; therefore, the NYC DOE does not have data on standard NYS assessments with which to evaluate the academic achievement and progress of the students at the school.

Instead, the primary measure of student performance for the school is the degree to which students master the objectives set forth in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These objectives may include both academic and non-academic goals such as life skills or social interaction objectives. This data is supplemented by pre- and post-test data from one of three standardized assessments: the Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP), the Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS); and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (Vineland). Students do not take all three assessments each year. The VB-MAPP assessment is normed to typical cognitive functioning for four-year old students. As a result, as students build their socio-emotional, behavioral, and cognitive skills, they grow out of the VB-MAPP assessment and their performance is instead assessed using AFLS. In addition, students in designated age/grade equivalents are also assessed using the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) for students with severe disabilities.

The percentage of students mastering at least 85% of their IEP objectives has increased over each of the full school years in the retrospective charter term. This percentage was 77% in 2010-2011, as compared to 91% in 2013-2014. In addition, in each year of the charter term, 89.5% or more of students who took the age/grade equivalent NYSAA in ELA, math, and/or science scored at level 3 or 4 on each assessment. During the four years for which the NYC DOE has academic data, 100% of New York Center for Autism Charter School students taking the NYSAA scored level 3 or 4 in two of the four years in ELA and math and all of the four years in science.

However, the percentage of students demonstrating increased performance on an informal standardized assessment such as AFLS, VB-MAPP, or Vineland has fallen slightly over the retrospective charter term. In the 2010-2011 school year, 100% of New York Center for Autism Charter School students demonstrated increased performance on one of the three assessments; this percentage fell to 93% in 2013-2014.

New York Center for Autism Charter School maintains detailed records of student achievement for each student, which enables the school to effectively differentiate instruction and tailor programs to students' needs. Each academic year, the school defines a skill acquisition list for each student; a student's skill acquisition list includes all IEP-mandated goals as well as additional skills that the school identifies for the student in collaboration with the teaching team and the student's parents/guardians. Skills may include academic goals such as demonstrating achievement with a Common Core Learning Standard, as well as social or behavioral skills such as maintaining appropriate behavior when an uncomfortable situation arises. Once the skill acquisition list has been identified, the school then creates a Student Data Binder for each enrolled student with separate sections for each identified skill on the skill acquisition list. The Student Data Binders also include, as necessary, a section for behavioral challenges and the associated interventions used to treat the challenging behaviors (examples of challenging behaviors include temper tantrums, pulling of hair, and yelling).

Instructors document student achievement on each skill at least once a week; the staff also graphs the data to summarize measures of progress. If a challenging behavior has been identified, instructors track the occurrence of the behavior every day using three-minute intervals.

Each school day is broken into three-minute intervals; instructors then note whether the behavior occurred in each interval and at the end of the day a percentage is derived by dividing the number of intervals a behavior occurred by the number of total intervals in the day. This is also tracked daily on graphs in the student's data binder, and separate graphs track the interventions used to mitigate the behavior. Documenting the frequency of the interventions allows the school to assess the effectiveness of each intervention and adjust as necessary.

Each student's data binder includes a detailed portfolio of all skills. The school maintains additional binders for each student for each of the standardized assessments that are administered. These binders are reviewed by senior staff regularly (teachers, clinical supervisors, the Director of Education, and the Executive Director) and serve as the catalyst for programming discussions. Parents and guardians also have access to these binders and are encouraged to review their student's information.

Over the four full years that academic data is available for the retrospective charter term, New York Center for Autism Charter School has met 100% of its applicable academic charter goals.<sup>4,5</sup> New York Center for Autism Charter School met four of four applicable academic performance goals in its most recent year, 2013-2014. The school has demonstrated a trend of sustained high achievement of its stated charter goals during the retrospective charter term under review.

The school has shown consistent evidence of a developed responsive education program and supportive learning environment. Reports from past NYC DOE visits to the school indicate that the school continues to evaluate its educational program, family engagement, and professional development to best meet the learning needs of its students. In the NYC DOE's Annual Comprehensive Review for 2013-2014, the team noted, "The school continues to focus on enhancing programming for adolescents and young adults in preparation for their transition to adult services. The school has created an Adolescent and Young Adult Programming Task Force comprised of Board and staff members...the school intends for [this] to help determine future programming, staffing and facility needs [based on the projected needs of students in this age group]." The school increased the maximum age at which students could be served at the school from age 14 to age 19 during the retrospective charter term; this change impacted the educational program and created new demands on professional development. Also noted in the same report, "The school continues to work on differentiating its staff training and ongoing professional development...the school plans to offer leveled training that could be offered simultaneously and is also exploring alternate modes of staff training." This differentiation of service delivery extends to family engagement – as students come from all five boroughs in New York City, the school began using technology to allow for remote participation in parent teacher association meetings and workshops during the last charter term in order to be responsive to the needs of all families.

New York Center for Autism Charter School did not receive a NYC DOE Progress Report for any of the school years in the retrospective charter term due to the school's unique model and student population.

### **Closing the Achievement Gap**

NYC DOE-authorized charter schools are also assessed based on their ability to close the achievement gap for specific student populations. In school years prior to the 2013-2014 school year, schools received additional credit on the NYC DOE Progress Report for progress and performance of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who start in

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<sup>4</sup> This calculation does not include goals which have not been evaluated (not applicable) either as a result of the goal no longer being measurable (e.g. NYC DOE Progress Report grades for 2013-14 school year forward) or the goal not yet measurable for the school at the time of the annual reporting (e.g. high school graduation rate for an academic year in which the school was not serving grade 12 students).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that because of the move to Common Core Learning Standards in 2012-2013, the NYC DOE did not include goals that measure a school's actual performance relative to 75% absolute proficiency or goals that measure reducing the performance gap of a cohort in ELA and Math assessments in its analysis of progress towards goals. Goals that compared the school to the Community School District performance were included in the analysis.

the lowest third of proficiency citywide. Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, charter schools will be assessed on the actual performance as well as the academic growth of students in these populations compared with public school students in the CSD and throughout New York City.

New York Center for Autism Charter School serves a special population of students, none of whom take the NYS ELA or math assessments. As a result, the standard Closing the Achievement Gap metrics are not applicable to this school. However, as all students have a diagnosis of severe to moderate autism and are designated as special needs students, academic performance and growth for all students served by the school would serve to close the achievement gap with the general education population of students in NYC public schools.

In addition, most of the school's students demonstrate significant language impairments as a component of their autism. Upon enrollment, many students lack functional verbal language. As a result, these students are not evaluated by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) using the English Language Learner (ELL) assessments that are otherwise given to the general education student population, are not designated as ELL students, and are not recommended for an ELL instructional program.

## **B. Governance, Operations & Finances**

New York Center for Autism Charter School is an operationally sound and fiscally viable organization. This assessment was made based on a review of the following indicators of operational and fiscal viability:

- New York Center for Autism Charter School's Board of Trustees bylaws;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's Board of Trustees meeting minutes;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's Board of Trustees financial disclosure forms;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's self-reported staffing data;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's FY11, FY12, FY13, and FY14 financial audits;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's FY15 budget and five-year projected budget;
- New York Center for Autism Charter School's staff and student/family handbooks; and
- On-site review of financial and operational records of the school.

Over the course of the school's charter term, the Board of Trustees has maintained a developed governance structure and organizational design. The current Chair of the Board of Trustees is Nancy Needle; Ms. Needle has served on the Board since 2008. The Board's membership, currently nine active members, is consistent with the Board's bylaws which require no fewer than five and no more than 18 members. The Board also has a formal mechanism for former Board members to remain engaged with the Board and the school; the Board created non-voting ex-officio memberships for Trustee Emeritus and Trustee for Life positions for former Board members who continue to support the school in significant ways.

There are clear lines of accountability for the school leadership team with the Board; the Executive Director provides monthly updates to the Board on academic progress, operations, young adult programming, special events, and grants managed by the school. Further, the school's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) also provides monthly financial updates to the Board during meetings as evidenced by Board meeting minutes. The Board has active and functioning committees, as required by its bylaws, including Executive, Finance, Operations and Governance, as recorded in meeting minutes and reported by the school. The Board restructured its committees in fall 2014 to better align to the Board's focal areas. In addition, the board makes effective use of additional ad hoc committees, such as Fundraising, Special Projects, and Technology, which have also been active during the retrospective charter term as evidenced by meeting minutes.

Over the course of the school's charter term, the school has developed a stable school culture. The school is led by Executive Director Julie Fisher, who has been with the school since its inception in 2005; Ms. Fisher assumed the position of Executive Director when it was created in 2008.

Average daily attendance for students during the retrospective charter term (2010-2011 through 2013-2014) was 96.9%,<sup>6</sup> and the school's annual attendance rate was above 95% in all years of the current charter term. Across the charter term, the school has generally achieved results above citywide averages on the NYC School Survey.

The school has had a trend of increased staff turnover during the retrospective charter term. The school reports having a staff of between eight and 11 instructional staff members in each year of the retrospective charter term, with zero, one, two and four instructional staff members not returning, either by choice or request, at the start of each school year 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, respectively. In the most recent year, four of 11 staff members did not return, either by choice or request, representing a 36% instructional staff turnover rate.

Overall, the school is in a strong position to meet near-term financial obligations. The school has at least 45 days of operating expenses in unrestricted cash on hand to meet obligations totaling \$358,051. Furthermore, based on the FY14 financial audit, the school's current ratio of 16.25 indicates a strong ability to meet its current liabilities.

Overall, the school is financially sustainable based on its current practices. Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY14, the school generated an aggregate surplus over these audited fiscal years. Based on the FY14 financial audit, the school's debt-to-asset ratio of 0.06 indicated that the school had more total assets than it had total liabilities. Finally, based on the financial audits from FY11 through FY14 and follow up, the school had overall positive cash flow from FY11 to FY14.

There was no material weakness noted in the four independent financial audits.

### **C. Compliance with Charter, Applicable Law and Regulations**

Over the charter term, New York Center for Autism Charter School has been compliant with all applicable laws and regulations.

Over the retrospective charter term, the Board has consistently had a membership size that falls within the range outlined in the school's charter and in the Board's bylaws, a minimum of five and maximum of 18 members. The Board currently has nine active members.

The school's current bylaws indicate that the Board is to hold six meetings per year. In all years of the charter term, the Board did hold the required number of monthly meetings, as evidenced by the Board Yearly Meeting Schedule and the posted meeting minutes. Required meetings are those which met quorum. The Board has not held the number of Board meetings required by the Charter Schools Act. The Charter Schools Act requires that the Board hold monthly meetings over a period of 12 calendar months per year. However, the Board has revised its bylaws to reflect this requirement and is committed to having the required number of meetings in the new charter term.

All current Board members have submitted conflict of interest and financial disclosure forms. The documents submitted do not demonstrate conflicts of interest.

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<sup>6</sup> Reflects school self-reported attendance data for school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014 as recorded in the school's Renewal Application dated December 2014.

The Board has consistently made all Board minutes and agendas available upon request to the public prior to or at Board meetings by posting all materials on its public website, and reminders and materials are in the electronic school calendar accessible for parents.

The Board did consistently submit the Annual Report to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) by the deadline of August 1 (or by the NYSED granted extension date) for each year of the current charter term. The school has posted to its website its annual audit for each year of the charter term, as required in charter law.

All staff members have appropriate fingerprint clearance.

The school has submitted required documentation for teacher certification and is compliant with state requirements for teacher certification. The Charter Schools Act prohibits more than five staff members or more than 30% of the teaching staff from not being certified in accordance with requirements applicable to other public schools.

The school has submitted its required immunization documentation and is in compliance with Department of Health standards of 99% for immunization.

For enrollment in the 2014-2015 school year, the school had an application deadline of April 1, 2014 and lottery date of May 17, 2014, adhering to charter law's requirement of accepting applications up to at least April 1. Over the course of the charter term, the school did consistently adhere to this requirement.

The school has provided the NYC DOE with a current and complete copy of its Student Discipline Policy for the 2014-2015 academic year. This policy was determined to be compliant with federal law.

#### **D. Plans for Next Charter Term**

As part of its next charter term the school plans to:

- The school has applied to extend the age range served from students aged five through 19 to students aged five through 21 in the next charter term.
- The school has also requested to increase authorized enrollment from 32 to 40 students in the next charter term.
  - To serve the increasingly adolescent student population (who currently comprise 50% of the student body), the school proposes to secure a Young Adult Program Annex to offer a developmentally and clinically appropriate program that would allow for increased socialization and work internship opportunities that are not available at the current site.
  - Approximately 10 adolescent students who are assessed to be capable of full-time work in the community would be served at the Young Adult Program Annex. A Clinical Supervisor/Director of Young Adult Programming would oversee the new site, along with additional staff as needed.
  - The highest need students would remain in the current location, where the school staff could continue to target important skills so that the students would benefit from additional staff and expertise on site.
  - The school would initially add four students in the first year that the Young Adult Program Annex is operational and another four students the following year.
- With the age expansion and enrollment increase requested, the school would still plan for students to predominantly enter the school at age five, drawn by lottery as per the preferences approved in the school's charter. Staffing increases would be made according to the students' IEPs, with most IEPs requiring a ratio of four students to one teacher and three instructors (4:1:3).
  - Students may, at some point, demonstrate skills that would indicate readiness to benefit from an alternate, less restrictive school environment.

- For all other students, a reduction in the staffing ratio by at least one instructor (e.g. 4:1:2) would be considered by the CSE, school, and parents at age 13, with a further reduction considered at the age of 16 (e.g. 4:1:1).

## Part 2: School Overview and History

New York Center for Autism Charter School is an elementary/middle/high school serving 32 students<sup>7</sup> aged five to 19 during the 2014-2015 school year.<sup>8</sup> It opened in the 2005-2006 school year and is under the terms of its second charter. The school is authorized to serve students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in an ungraded setting for students aged five through 19. The school's current charter term expires on April 14, 2015.<sup>9</sup> The school does not currently offer a public universal Pre-Kindergarten program in New York City. The school is located in a New York City Department of Education<sup>10</sup>-operated facility in Community School District 4 in Manhattan and is co-located with DREAM Charter School and P.S. 50 Vito Marcantonio.<sup>11</sup>

New York Center for Autism Charter School (NYCACS) is dedicated to defining best practices for the public school education of children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. The school executes against this mission by providing an intensive, year-round individualized education program based on the principals of applied behavior analysis. The school is ungraded, offering elementary, middle and high school grade levels. The school provides direct one-on-one instruction, year-round, to students on the Autism Disorder Spectrum and focuses on instruction that will ultimately prepare students for the world beyond the school. The school currently offers eight ungraded classes with an average class size of four students and four adults in each classroom, depending on the mandated ratio from each student's IEP.

As a lab school, NYCACS is dedicated to disseminating best practices and increasing awareness of Autism beyond the school. The school developed and manages a formal Peer Mentoring program which allows middle school students enrolled at the co-located public district school, P.S. 50, to work with NYCACS students and staff two days per week during the second semester. Students from P.S. 50 submit a formal application for the program and receive training from NYCACS staff regarding autism, the school's educational program, peer mentoring, and principals of applied behavioral analysis. In addition to the peer mentoring program, NYCACS is the recipient of a dissemination grant from the NYSED which was implemented during the retrospective charter term.

The New York Center for Autism Charter School's Board of Trustees is led by chair Nancy Needle. The school is led by Executive Director Julie Fisher, who has been at the school for ten years, since the school's inception in 2005. Ms. Fisher was named the Executive Director in 2008.

The school provides a year-round program for students who reside in all five of the City's boroughs, most of whom receive mandated transportation services per their IEPs. Consequently, the effects of both Hurricane Sandy in November 2012 and the school bus strike of January–February 2013 were very disruptive to the school's schedule and academic program. The school tried to mitigate the effects of these disruptions by maintaining close communication with parents, and passing on information about how parents could be reimbursed for finding alternate transportation.

The school typically enrolls new students at age five, and the school reports that it does enroll new students mid-year. Students are selected for admission through a lottery process, with the school focusing on serving the needs of students in three broad categories across the autism spectrum: severe (cohort 1), severe to moderate (cohort 2) and moderate (cohort 3). Student applications are categorized according to the aforementioned three cohorts; these categorizations are reviewed and approved by the CSE. As students leave and/or graduate and spaces open up at the school, student applications are selected via a lottery for admission from the same cohort as those students who left and/or graduated. New York Center for Autism Charter School follows this procedure in order to maintain a student

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<sup>7</sup> ATS data as of October 31, 2014

<sup>8</sup> The school serves students with Autism Spectrum Disorder who are aged five to nineteen. These students may be classified in any grade level, kindergarten through grade twelve.

<sup>9</sup> NYC DOE internal data

<sup>10</sup> NYC DOE internal data

<sup>11</sup> NYC DOE Location Code Generation and Management System

population that is roughly one-third cohort 1 students, one-third cohort 2 students, and one-third cohort 3 students. There were 83 students on the waitlist after the Spring 2014 lottery.<sup>12</sup>

Over the charter term, the school enrolled and served students as follows with average class size and section count noted for the most recently completed school year, 2013-2014.

### Enrollment<sup>13</sup>

Annual Enrollment *	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Total Enrollment	30	34	33	32

\* Enrollment figures reflect ATS data as of October 31 for each school year with the exception of the 2012-2013 school year, which is as of October 26, 2012.

### Additional Enrollment Data

School Year 2013-2014 Information	Section Count	Average Class Size
Bridged Classes	8	4
Students Admitted Through The Lottery	1	

\* Lottery and section count information are based on self-reported data from the 2013-2014 DOE Annual Charter School Survey. Average Class Sizes were determined by dividing ATS enrollment as of October 31, 2013 by the appropriate grade-level section count.

Please see additional demographic data in Section 4 of this report for information regarding the enrollment of special populations at the New York Center for Autism Charter School. This information includes enrollment data for the percentage of students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, English Language Learners and students with disabilities as compared to the CSD and citywide averages, as well as targets recently finalized by the New York State Education Department.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Self-reported information collected through the 2014-2015 DOE Annual Charter School Survey

<sup>13</sup> Grade-level enrollment is not available as the school's students are not classified by grade but rather by age-appropriate academic, social and behavioral indicators aligned with each student's IEP.

<sup>14</sup> Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, Board of Regents authorized charter schools, including those authorized by NYC DOE, will be held accountable to enrollment targets established by NYSED for students with disabilities, English Language Learner students, and students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch. Please note that the recently finalized targets are currently based on enrollment in the 2010-2011 school year and may be updated in the future.

## Part 3: Renewal Report Overview

### Renewal Report

This report contains the findings and recommendations of the NYC DOE regarding the charter school's application for charter renewal. This report is based on a cumulative record of the school's progress during the current charter term, including but not limited to oversight visits, annual reports, and formal correspondence between the school and its authorizer, the NYC DOE, all of which are conducted in order to evaluate and monitor the charter school's academic, fiscal, and operational performance. Additionally, the NYC DOE incorporates into this report its findings from the renewal application process, which includes a written application, a report on student achievement data and a school visit by the Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships (OSDCP) and other staff from the NYC DOE.

Upon review of all the relevant materials, a recommendation is made to the NYC DOE Chancellor. The Chancellor's determination, and the findings on which that decision is based, is then submitted to the New York State Board of Regents.

### Is the school an academic success?

To assess whether a school is an academic success, the NYC DOE considers performance measures, including, but not limited to the following (as appropriate for grades served):

- New York State ELA and math assessment absolute results;
- New York State Regents exams passage rates;
- Comparative proficiency for elementary and middle schools, including growth rates for ELA and math proficiency;
- Comparative graduation rates and Regents completion rates for high schools;
- Closing the achievement gap performance relative to CSD or New York City public schools;
- New York State Alternate Assessment or other approved alternate assessments; and
- Performance data pertaining to college and career readiness.

Academic success is rated as **Demonstrated**, **Partially Demonstrated**, or **Not Yet Demonstrated**.

### Is the school a fiscally and operationally sound, viable organization?

To assess whether a school is a fiscally and operationally sound, viable organization, OSDCP focuses on three areas: Governance Structure & Organizational Design, School Climate & Community Engagement, and Financial Health. This includes an analysis of the school's audited financial statements, based on the National Association of Charter School Authorizer's Core Performance Framework.<sup>15</sup>

The NYC DOE considers a variety of supporting materials and data, including but not limited to the following:

- Board of Trustee bylaws;
- Board of Trustee meeting minutes;
- Annual Reports submitted by schools to New York State Education Department;
- NYC DOE School Surveys;
- Data collection sheets provided by schools;
- Student, staff, and Board turnover rates;
- Audits of authorized enrollment numbers; and
- Annual financial audits.

A school's Governance Structure & Organizational Design and Climate & Community Engagement are rated as **Developed**, **Partially Developed**, or **Not Yet Developed**. A school's Financial Health is rated to indicate whether there are concerns about the near-term financial obligations and the financial sustainability of the school.

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<sup>15</sup> Please refer to the following website for more information:  
[http://nacsa.mycrowdwisdom.com/diweb/catalog/item/id/126547/q/%20q=performance\\*20framework&c=82](http://nacsa.mycrowdwisdom.com/diweb/catalog/item/id/126547/q/%20q=performance*20framework&c=82)

**Is the school compliant with its charter and all applicable law and regulations?**

As it pertains to compliance, the NYC DOE identifies areas of compliance and noncompliance with relevant laws and regulations as identified in the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework.

**Staff Representatives**

The following experts participated in the review of this school, including the renewal visit to the school on March 24–25, 2015:

- DawnLynne Kacer, Executive Director, NYC DOE Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships
- Kim Wong, Director of Operations, NYC DOE Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships
- Caitlin Robisch, Director of Analytics, NYC DOE Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships
- Lynnette Aqueron, Senior School Improvement Specialist, NYC DOE Division of English Language Learners and Student Support
- Laurie Price, Independent Consultant
- Arthur Sadoff, Independent Consultant

## Part 4: Findings

### Essential Question 1: Is the School an Academic Success?

At the time of this school's renewal the New York Center for Autism Charter School has demonstrated academic achievement and progress.

#### High Academic Attainment and Improvement

- The school has four full years of academic performance data at the time of this report.

Given the school's unique model and student population, the school's students do not take the NYS English Language Arts or math assessments. The primary measure of student performance for this charter school is the degree to which students master the objectives set forth in their Individualized Education Programs. This data is supplemented by pre- and post-test data from one of three standardized assessments: the Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, the Assessment of Functional Living Skills; and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales. In addition, students in designated age/grade equivalents are also assessed using the New York State Alternate Assessment for students with severe disabilities.

#### School Evaluation of Student Performance and Progress<sup>16</sup>

Academic Performance Analysis					
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	Charter Term Average
Percent of Student IEP Objectives Mastered	77%	84%	88%	91%	85%
Percent of Students Progressing*	100%	100%	94%	93%	97%

\* Reflects students whose performance improved between administrations of an informal assessment of linguistic and functional behaviors, as measured by the Assessment of Functional Living Skills, the Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, or the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales.

#### Students scoring at or above Level 3 on NYS Alternative Assessments

% Proficient on NYS Alternative Assessments					
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	Charter Term Average
English Language Arts	100.0%	100.0%	94.7%	90.0%	96.2%
Math	100.0%	100.0%	89.5%	95.0%	96.1%
Science <sup>17</sup>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0% <sup>18</sup>	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>16</sup> School reported information collected as part of the Renewal Application dated December 2014.

<sup>17</sup> The majority of students at New York Center for Autism Charter School do not take the NYSAA Science exam; in any given year, 24% or fewer of the school's students took the exam

<sup>18</sup> The number of students who took the NYSAA Science exam in 2012-2013 does not meet the minimum threshold for results to be considered significant. Given the unreliability of measurements based on small numbers, the minimum number of students is five for student sample-size criteria to be met.

## Mission and Academic Goals

According to the Renewal Application submitted to the NYC DOE by New York Center for Autism Charter School, as well as annual reports submitted to the New York State Education Department, over each of the four full academic years in the retrospective charter term, the school achieved/met academic goals as follows:

- 3 of 3 applicable charter goals in the first year of the charter term,
- 4 of 4 in the second year,
- 4 of 4 in the third year,<sup>19</sup> and
- 4 of 4 in the fourth year.

### Progress Towards Academic Charter Goals \*

Academic Goals	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
1. Within their own abilities, at least 75% of the school's students will annually master a minimum of 85% of the objectives (i.e., skill acquisition and behavior reduction) set forth in their IEPs. Objective: Data are collected on all programs that support IEP goals and objectives (i.e., skill acquisition programs and behavior reduction programs).	Met	Met	Met	Met
2. Within their own abilities, 75% of the school's students will annually demonstrate increased performance on an informal assessment of linguistic and functional behaviors.	Met	Met	Met	Met
3. The school will achieve Adequate Yearly Progress in required subject areas pursuant to NCLB using the New York State Alternate Assessment.	Met	Met	Met	Met
4. The school will seek to move students from their New York Center for Autism Charter School placement to a less restrictive environment. Objective: In any five-year period, New York Center for Autism Charter School will seek to move at least 5% of its students from a NYC Autism Charter School classroom to a less restrictive placement.	N/A	Met	Met	Met

\* Goals were self-reported by the school in the school's Renewal Application submitted to NYC DOE and 2013-2014 Annual Report documentation submitted to NYSED.

## Responsive Education Program

The school administers the Verbal Behavior-Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, the Assessment of Functional Living Skills, and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales as assessments of student performance and progress; the following data was found:

- In each year of the retrospective charter term, the school met its charter goal of at least 75% of students annually demonstrating increased performance on all assessments.
- In school years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014, the percentage of all students who demonstrated increased performance on the pre- and post-assessment(s) administered to each student was 100%, 100%, 94%, and 93%, respectively.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that because of the move to Common Core standards in 2012-2013, the NYC DOE did not include goals that measure a school's actual performance relative to 75% or greater absolute proficiency on the NYS ELA and math exams or goals that measure reducing the performance gap of a cohort in ELA and math assessments in its analysis of progress towards goals for the 2012-2013 school year. Goals that refer to comparative academic performance of the school (e.g. to the Community School District) were included in the analysis. In addition, beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, the NYC DOE will not include goals that are related to NYC DOE Progress Report Grades or, due to a change in state regulation, goals that are related to standardized assessments for students in grades kindergarten through two in its analysis of progress towards goals. However, these exclusions do not apply to the four academic goals reviewed for New York Center for Autism Charter School.

As part of the renewal review process, representatives for the NYC DOE visited the school on March 24– 25, 2015. Based on discussion, document review, and observation, the following was noted:

- **Addressing the Needs of All Learners:**

- The school works intensively to meet the needs of all learners. For each student, a data binder is maintained. This binder contains a skill acquisition list individualized for each student, as well as the IEP, assessment results, classwork, behavior charts, etc.
  - For each skill on the skills acquisition list, a detailed program is developed to teach that particular skill to the student. As the program is implemented, instructional staff collect data twice per week on accuracy and acquisition to see trends over time. Based on the rate of acquisition (how quickly the student masters the skill), the program is adjusted up or down. For example, in physical education, some students progressed over the course of the year from hitting off a tee to hitting off pitches, and increasing stamina in base running.
  - The skill acquisition list is created based on the student's IEP and input from families, who provide additional skills that are needed for functioning at home and outside of school. The school shared an example of working with a family to design an instructional plan to accustom the student to traveling on an airplane. The plan involved working with the student to sit for increasing periods of time, to tolerate a seat belt, to refrain from 'flicking' his hands, and to engage in a leisure activity appropriate for a sustained period of time (using an iPad). This skill acquisition allowed the family to have a successful first family vacation. (Please refer to Essential Question 2 below for additional examples of how the school has engaged families in the education of their children in innovative and meaningful ways.)
- Each class team meets once per week to review student data and make adjustments to programs.
- Progress towards IEP goals is monitored monthly, and programs/student data binders are updated accordingly.
- The school makes every effort to have students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) possible.
  - The majority of students arrive at NYCACS with an IEP staffing ratio of four students to one teacher and three instructors (4:1:3)
  - At the age of 13, a reduction in the staffing ratio by at least one instructor (e.g. 4:1:2) will be considered by the CSE, school, and parents, with a further reduction considered at the age of 16 (e.g., 4:1:1). There are several reasons for this reduction:
    - To prepare students and families for future adult service settings in which support ratios will be significantly less, and to give students the skills required to be successful in those settings;
    - To promote increased independence and decreased reliance on support from others; and
    - To promote increased social interaction with peers.
  - During the NYC DOE's on-site renewal visit, one NYCACS student was observed going to the co-located school to participate in a Foundations phonics lesson in a general education classroom. During the observation, the student was called to the front of the room to lead part of the lesson and was visibly delighted with his achievement.
  - Also during the NYC DOE's on-site renewal visit, peer mentors from the co-located school were observed in three of the NYCACS classrooms working with NYCACS students in small groups. These peer mentors are in NYCACS classrooms two times per week for a full class period (45 minutes) during the second semester of each academic year. Peer mentors are general education students, typically in the sixth grade, male and female.

- Over the last charter term, five students (16%) left NYCACS for less restrictive environments; two students were moved to non-Autism specific special education settings with higher student to staff ratios and three students were moved to general education settings with special education supports.
  - A Human Rights Committee examines Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) that contain any type of restrictive component, such as removal from the class, to ensure that they are ethical, respect students' rights, and include parental consent. The committee reviews behavior data annually.
  - The school is dedicated to preparing students for life beyond school. As such, there is a large focus on life skills training:
    - Students go on weekly trips to area grocery stores with a list of items to find and purchase, practice using a debit card to make retail purchases, and use NYC mass transit (subway or bus) as well as pre-paid metro-cards to travel between the school and internships or off-site educational interactions.
    - Students take exercise classes at a partner organization, Asphalt Green, with instructors who are not trained in ABA to experience a lower level of support, but in a supportive environment.
    - Students are assigned authentic school jobs. For example a student was observed entering receipt amounts into a spreadsheet that eventually goes to the school business manager for financial purposes. As reported by students and the school, another student is in charge of collecting the school's recycling materials, another re-stocks school supplies, and several work in the school store.
    - Students were observed making simple snacks for their own consumption, others worked on cooking from recipes, while others learned to wash and fold a load of laundry. Several students receive instruction in hygiene and personal care in a developmentally appropriate instructional bathroom.
  - Eight community partners (including Facebook, Harlem RBI, Fairway grocery store, and White Castle) host 12 students for work readiness instruction and worksite training once per week. In class at the school site, students practice tasks and social skills needed to maintain employment. A NYCACS coach attends the job site with the student and collects data using a community-based instruction data collection protocol. The students have a worksite "supervisor" who assigns the actual tasks.
  - Starting at age 14, Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) are developed for each student. The goal of this is to focus programming on adaptive living, academic, communication, and social/emotional skills that will allow students to function as independently as possible by the time they transition out of the educational system. One-third of the school's curriculum is devoted to preparing students for their role as citizens in the community, including the areas of Self Care, Life Skills, Personal Safety, Pre-vocational, Community, Leisure, and Social Interaction.
    - The school plans one or two Transition Planning Meetings each year (one for younger students; two for older students) these are dedicated to assisting parents in planning for their child's future transition and life as an adult.
    - The Director of Transition and Community Outreach ensures students are exposed to the community.
    - In 2012, the school formed an Adolescent/Young Adult Task Force to specifically develop action plans focused on transition readiness for students who are anticipated to be able to work in the community in some capacity, students who are likely to need a higher level of support, and parents/family members.
- **Instructional Model and Classroom Instruction:**

During the renewal visit on March 24–25, 2015, all eight classrooms were observed with the school's Education Director, Director of Transition and Community Outreach, and Clinical Supervisors escorting the NYC DOE renewal visit team.

- In all observed classes, teachers were following the school's models of teaching, including direct instruction using discrete trial instruction, incidental teaching, and long response chains, while utilizing individualized behavior management plans.
  - Most students received instruction with a staffing ratio of four students to one teacher and three instructors, as per the students' IEPs.
  - To promote independence, the school also uses dyads. During the observation, small group lessons were observed. For example, in a life-skills class, two students were monitored closely by one adult as they boiled pasta, with other adults monitoring from a distance. In the same class, one student was supported closely by one adult as he completed the same task.
  - Incidental teaching was observed when a student came inappropriately close to a visitor. Instructors stepped in to correct the behavior and explain and model maintaining appropriate distance with others.
- In all classrooms, checks for understanding included performance-based tasks, questioning, and observation. For example, in a life-skills class, students took turns ringing up mock purchases from the school store, and answering questions about prices and products. In another class, a student sent an email to a teacher to communicate a job-related issue.
- All classrooms were completely differentiated, based on each student's IEP and skills acquisition list; each classroom was indeed personalized to each student and his/her individual needs.
  - For example, in one classroom one student pointed at letters, while another pointed at pictures, and another spoke the answer aloud.
  - In a gym class, three students rested in chairs while another student rested on a bouncy chair as a reward between activities.
  - In another class, one student's materials to achieve a task were all located in her designated area, while another, more independent student moved to and from different areas of the classroom to gather his own materials independently.
  - In a life skills class where students were cooking from recipes, one student's programs (or instructions) were in text, while instructions for another were in pictures. In this same example, one child was coached to cross off tasks as completed, and the other moved manipulatives down the page to keep track of progress.
  - For non-verbal students, carefully developed augmentative communication devices were employed successfully; other students wore supportive clothing, including vests.
- In all observed classes, students were responsive to teacher directions and instruction and were either fully or mostly on task.
  - For example, one student received completed manipulatives for each task. Another student was encouraged to complete tasks with reminders that he was working for a healthy snack. Another student progressed through tasks "winning" free time on the trampoline for each. Another student had a behavior tracker that indicated red/yellow/green, while another student filled out his own behavior tracker every five minutes for increased positive reinforcement.
- Based on debriefs with the school's leadership team members after classroom visits, all classrooms had instruction that aligned with the instructional model and current academic goals of the school.

## **Learning Environment**

The school is dedicated to dissemination of best practices that have proved successful at NYCACS, and holds itself accountable to this by having a charter goal that speaks to extending NYCACS practices beyond the school.

- The school received a Dissemination Grant from the New York State Education Department in 2013. The NYCACS grant project manager works with three District 75 public schools (in Harlem, Brooklyn and the Bronx) and works intensely with one teacher in his/her classroom on a range of

issues, including managing challenging behaviors, maintaining student engagement, and using independent schedules. The project manager also delivers professional development sessions for all staff (paraprofessionals and teachers) as well as parents.

- The school has developed a Peer Mentoring program with P.S. 50, the co-located district school. In this program, middle school students from P.S. 50, with the support and nomination of their teacher, write an essay to apply to be a peer mentor. Up to 10 students are selected each year to participate in the program, with six to eight serving as peer mentors during the second semester of each academic year. Participating students of P.S. 50, after completing training with NYCACS instructional staff, work with NYCACS students weekly through June of each school year. The P.S. 50 students visit NYCACS three times per week during the second semester for 45 minutes per session, foregoing their lunch and recess periods at P.S. 50 to instead receive lunch at NYCACS, to participate in the program and work with students from NYCACS.
  - The NYCACS staff has created a robust training and orientation program for the peer mentors; this program includes modules so that the mentors can successfully interact with, teach, and play with children with Autism. The school uses a thoughtful training program where the typically developing students learn what autism is, what ABA is, what attending behavior is, along with how to give autistic students instruction, work with their motivational systems, and collect data.
    - NYCACS staff report that the peer mentors are particularly helpful in coaching autistic children in social skills, as the NYCACS teachers may not know the “latest cool handshakes or dances”.
    - School staff report that peer mentors attest to the impact of the program on how they treat all people in their lives who may be different, and others have reported that participation has influenced what they want to study or learn in college. Former peer mentors have gone on to study special education and people with special needs, and one former peer mentor has even been hired at NYCACS.
- The school has hosted five open houses per year for professionals, parents, and community members, and has co-hosted day-long conferences on transition issues for the Autism community.
  - The school offers formal training opportunities for interns.
    - Over the course of the charter term 61 interns, ranging from high school students to graduate and medical residency level interns, have received professional development that is similar to NYCACS teachers. The interns are held to similar competency standards.
    - The school reports that many interns go on to pursue teaching positions within the NYC public school system and that NYCACS has hired 12 of the interns that completed the internship.

NYC DOE representatives conducted one-on-one interviews with nine classroom teachers, including Instructors, Lead Instructors, Clinical Supervisors, and Head Teachers. The following was noted:

- All interviewed teachers reported that they received high quality professional development, both school-based and externally. Teachers understood the formal evaluation process and reported that that the supervisory observations and subsequent feedback helped them to grow professionally.
- All interviewed teachers reported that they use data in the classrooms and participate in formal data gathering two times per week, formal monthly data analysis, and informal data gathering on a more frequent basis.
- All teachers reported utilizing data to make adjustments to teaching.
- All interviewed teachers reported having multiple colleagues to turn to with questions and for support, and the presence of a positive, open, and supportive culture at the school.

NYC DOE representatives conducted a group interview with two students. The following was noted:

- Both were happy at the school and expressed that the best part of the school for them was how wonderful their teachers were.
- Both students participated in the school's work site program and explained the various duties they had at their work sites (one was placed at Fairway; the other at White Castle). It was evident from

the student's comments and self-reflection that the two interviewed students had made notable progress in their social, academic, and language development while at the school.

According to the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey, 100% of parents agree or strongly agree "that the school has teachers who are interested and attentive when they discuss [their] child" and 92% of parents who responded to the survey agree or strongly agree "that the school has high expectations for [their] child."<sup>20</sup>

According to the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey 100% of teachers agree or strongly agree that "order and discipline are maintained at the school" and 93% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that "at my school students are often harassed or bullied in school."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> According to the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey, 96% of parent respondents strongly agree that New York Center for Autism Charter School has teachers who are interested and attentive when they discuss their child; another 4% agree with the statement. 56% of parent respondents strongly agree that New York Center for Autism Charter School has high expectations for their child; another 36% agree with the statement.

<sup>21</sup> According to the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey, 76% of teacher respondents strongly agree that order and discipline are maintained at New York Center for Autism Charter School; another 24% agree with the statement. Of teacher respondents, 76% strongly disagree that students are often harassed or bullied in the school; 17% of teacher respondents disagree with the statement; and 7% strongly agree with the statement.

## **Essential Question 2: Is the School a Fiscally and Operationally Sound, Viable Organization?**

### **Governance Structure & Organizational Design**

Over the course of the school's charter term, the Board of Trustees has developed its governance structure and organizational design.

On April 14, 2015, as part of the renewal review process, representatives for the NYC DOE met with a representation of the school's Board of Trustees independent of the school leadership team. Based on document review and observation, the following was noted:

- The Board currently has nine active members. This level of membership is consistent within the minimum of five and maximum of 18 members established in the Board's bylaws.
- The Board has consistently achieved quorum, as recorded in meeting minutes reviewed. Quorum was achieved in 16 out of 16 Board meeting minutes reviewed from the retrospective charter term.
- The Executive Director updates the Board on academic progress, operations, young adult programming, special events, and grant administration at the school, as recorded in meeting minutes reviewed. This occurred at each of the 16 meetings reviewed. The Chief Financial Officer, Mark Saretsky, gives standing updates on the school's financials at every Board meeting, and the Board's Finance committee meets every month as well.
- There are clear lines of accountability between the Board and school leadership team as evidenced by the school's organizational chart and school leadership's monthly updates on academic, financial, and operational performance to the Board and its committees, as recorded in Board meeting minutes.
- The Board has active and functioning committees, as required by its bylaws, including Executive, Finance, Operations and Governance, as recorded in meeting minutes and reported by the school. The Board restructured its committees in fall 2014 to better align to the Board's focal areas. In addition, the board makes effective use of additional ad hoc committees such as Fundraising, Special Projects, and Technology, which have also been active during the retrospective charter term as evidenced by meeting minutes. In addition, the school utilizes the titles of Trustee Emeritus and Trustee for Life for former Board members who continue to support the school in significant ways. These are non-voting, ex-officio members and not counted for quorum.
- A founding Board member, Ilene Lainer, is still a member of the school's Board of Trustees.
- The school leader is Julie Fisher, who has been at the school for ten years, since the school's inception in 2005. Ms. Fisher has been the Executive Director since 2008.
- The Board's President (or Chair), Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer positions, all specified positions in the Board's bylaws, are currently filled.

### **School Climate & Community Engagement**

Over the course of the school's charter term, the school has developed a stable school culture.

- In each year of its retrospective charter term, the school had an annual attendance rate above 95%. Average daily attendance for students over the course of the charter term is 96.9% according to the data in the table below.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The table reflects school self-reported attendance data for school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014 as recorded in the school's Renewal Application dated December 2014.

## Average Attendance

School Attendance				
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
<b>New York Center for Autism Charter School</b>	<b>96.5%</b>	<b>97.0%</b>	<b>97.0%</b>	<b>97.0%</b>
NYC	93.2%	93.9%	93.6%	93.2%
Difference from NYC	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.8

\* NYC attendance figures reflect average attendance across all general education district schools.

- Instructional staff turnover has increased markedly over each year of the retrospective charter term. In 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, the percentage of staff who did not return, either by choice or request, at the start of the following school year was 0%, 9%, 18% and 36%, respectively. These turnover rates represent zero, one, two, and four instructional staff members, respectively, who left the school either by choice or request – a doubling of the instructional turnover rate each year.<sup>23</sup> However, there is insufficient evidence to assess if this turnover has affected student performance.
- Student mobility is presented below for the charter term without comparison to other schools, the CSD, or NYC as final student retention goals were not yet finalized by the New York State Education Department for the retrospective charter term at the time of the creation of this report. Based on the NYC DOE's evaluation and not in comparison to any other school, the CSD or NYC averages, the school has not had challenges with retaining students.

## Mobility

Student Mobility out of New York Center for Autism Charter School *				
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Number of Students who Left the School**	1	3	2	3
Percent of Students who Left the School	3.3%	8.8%	6.1%	9.4%

\* Figures are based on student enrollment as of October 31 for each respective school year with the exception of the 2012-2013 school year, which is as of October 26, 2012. Students in terminal grades are not included.

\*\*The number of students who left the school includes students who left the school for a less restrictive environment. As self-reported in the school's progress towards goals, five students over the charter term left NYCACS for a less restrictive environment.

- The NYC DOE has made changes to the NYC School Survey during the entirety of the retrospective charter term. Questions asked have been altered, added, or deleted from year to year. Also, beginning with the 2013-2014 NYC School Survey, survey categories will not be measured in total points out of 10 possible points. To allow for consistency during the evaluated charter term, selected questions, consistent with the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework were identified as relevant for charter schools. These are presented below for the duration of the retrospective charter term. In the most recent year of survey results, 2013-2014, the percentage of teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing was above citywide averages and 100% for all of the four selected questions. Similarly, the percentage of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing was above citywide averages for all of the three selected questions.
- NYC School Survey Response Rates should be comparable over time, however, as the measurement of these has remained consistent. Response rates for each parents, teachers, and students (if participating) are presented below for each year of the charter term. The response rates for New York Center for Autism Charter School teachers and parents have been above NYC averages in each year of the retrospective charter term.

<sup>23</sup> Self-reported information from school-submitted data collection form in December 2014.

## NYC School Survey Results

Percent of Respondents that Agree or Strongly Agree						
Survey Question		New York Center for Autism Charter School				Citywide Average
		2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2013-2014
Students*	Most of my teachers make me excited about learning.**	-	-	-	-	-
	Most students at my school treat each other with respect.	-	-	-	-	-
	I feel safe in the hallways, bathrooms, locker room, cafeteria, etc.	-	-	-	-	-
Parents	I feel satisfied with the education my child has received this year.	96%	96%	100%	100%	95%
	My child's school makes it easy for parents to attend meetings.	93%	85%	86%	96%	94%
	I feel satisfied with the response I get when I contact my child's school.	100%	96%	100%	100%	95%
Teachers	Order and discipline are maintained at my school.	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%
	The principal at my school communicates a clear vision for our school.	100%	100%	100%	100%	88%
	School leaders place a high priority on the quality of teaching.	100%	100%	100%	100%	92%
	I would recommend my school to parents.***	-	100%	100%	100%	81%

\* Students at New York Center for Autism Charter School do not participate in the NYC School Survey.

\*\* This question was phrased as "My teachers inspire me to learn" in the 2009-2010 through 2012-2013 School Surveys.

\*\*\* This question was not introduced until the 2011-2012 School Survey.

## NYC School Survey Results

		Response Rates			
		2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Students*	New York Center for Autism Charter School	-	-	-	-
	NYC	-	-	-	-
Parents	New York Center for Autism Charter School	96%	88%	93%	86%
	NYC	52%	53%	54%	53%
Teachers	New York Center for Autism Charter School	100%	97%	93%	100%
	NYC	82%	81%	83%	81%

\* Students at New York Center for Autism Charter School do not participate in the NYC School Survey.

- The school’s charter goals include, “parents will be encouraged to judge [the school] program as effective.” As self-reported by the school, New York Center for Autism Charter School met this goal in each year of the charter.
  - In addition to the NYC DOE School Survey, each year the New York Center for Autism Charter School produces an internal survey for families called the ‘New York Center for Autism Charter School Program Effectiveness Survey’. This survey uses a Likert Scale of 1-5, where 5 is Strongly Agree and 1 is Strongly Disagree, to assess families’ satisfaction with the school in a variety of areas. The school reported that 100% of parents participated each year over the retrospective charter term. On average, over school years 2010-2011 through 2013-2014, 98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Overall the school program is effective”.

As part of the renewal process, representatives for the NYC DOE have collected evidence relevant to the school’s climate and community engagement over the school’s charter term. Based on discussion, document collection and review, and observation, the following was noted:

- The school has robust and thoughtful structures to involve parents in their children’s education.
  - The school offers home and community consultations and conducts these visits for all students bi-monthly. These sessions allow the family to identify skills needed outside of school to be worked on at school. For example, a parent recounted that she asked the school to help her manage her daughter’s behavior when eating a meal. The school developed a successful behavior plan that enabled the parent to take the child out to join the family at a restaurant. For another student, the school worked with the child to prepare for and develop the skills to deal with an upcoming doctor’s visit and shot administration that previously was extremely challenging. The school asks parents to participate in five home/community visits per year.
  - Individualized clinic meetings with parents on-site at the school allow parents to voice concerns and to participate in planning, training, and problem solving strategies specific to their child’s needs. In these meetings, the school reviews the student’s current data binder and skills acquisition list, and uses parent feedback to adjust the skills acquisition list and/or the programs. In addition to parent workshops, these individualized clinics have been a design element since the school’s inception; the school asks parents to attend five clinics each year. To increase participation at parent workshops, the school added a remote access feature which has increased parental participation in the workshops, a supplement to the clinics.
  - Formal updates on students’ Progress Towards IEP goals are sent to parents four times per year; however, informal discussions are ongoing due to the intensity of parent involvement in the school’s program.
- The NYC DOE conducted a public renewal hearing on March 24, 2015 at 433 E. 100<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan, NY for the school in an effort to elicit public comments. Approximately 28 participants attended the hearing with eight speaking in support of the school’s renewal and none speaking in opposition. In addition, nine written comments were submitted, all in support of the school’s renewal.
- The NYC DOE made randomized phone calls to parents from a roster provided by the school for students of all grades. Calls to school parents/guardians were made during April of 2015, until five phone calls were completed. Of these calls, 100% provided positive feedback regarding the school.
- In addition, during the renewal visit to the school, while observing students taking an aerobics class off-site at Asphalt Green, four parents were informally interviewed as they observed their children (as part of an instruction-focused visit/observation).
  - Each parent expressed their appreciation for the work that was being done by the teachers and administrators at the school.
  - All parents praised the school for helping them with difficult situations at home.
  - Parents reported that feedback from teachers is extremely useful and they each singled out the importance of the home visits that occur six times each year.
  - Each of the four parents expressed amazement at the progress their children have made and felt lucky to have their children enrolled at NYCACS.

## Financial Health

### **Overall, the school is in a strong position to meet near-term financial obligations.**

- Based on the FY14 financial audit, the school's current ratio of 16.25 indicated a strong ability to meet its current liabilities.
- Based on the FY14 financial audit, the school had sufficient unrestricted cash on hand of \$358,051 to cover its operating expenses for at least 45 days without an infusion of cash
- A comparison of the enrollment projections for the 2014-2015 budget to the actual enrollment as of October 31, 2014 revealed that the school had met its enrollment target, supporting its projected revenue.
- As of the FY14 financial audit, the school had no debt obligations.

## Financial Sustainability

### **Overall, the school is financially sustainable based on its current practices.**

- Based on the financial audits from FY11 to FY14, the school generated an aggregate surplus over these audited fiscal years.
- Based on the FY14 financial audit, the school's debt-to-asset ratio of 0.06 indicated that the school had more total assets than it had total liabilities.
- Based on the financial audits from FY11 through FY14 and follow up, the school had overall positive cash flow from FY11 to FY14.

There was no material weakness noted in the four independent financial audits.

Based on document review and an interview during the visit to the school, the following was noted:

- The school included a projected five-year budget that encompasses FY16 to FY20 as a part of its renewal application. In this projected five-year budget, the school projected a cumulative deficit totaling \$1.1 million between FY16 and FY20. According to the school, this budget was drafted with the expectation that its requested enrollment change would be approved at the current negotiated per pupil revenue rate and that the school would acquire a private facility to accommodate its life skills annex. This projection does not consider the school remaining at its current enrollment of 32 students, an increase in the per pupil revenue amount, or co-location of the life skills annex in a NYC DOE-operated facility. Any of these factors will affect the projections in the five-year budget for FY16 to FY20. The NYC DOE is currently reviewing the school's proposal to increase its per pupil revenue rate.

### **Essential Question 3: Is the School Compliant with its Charter and All Applicable Law and Regulations?**

Over the charter term, the Board and school have been compliant with all applicable laws and regulations.

As of the review in April 2015, the Board of Trustees for the New York Center for Autism Charter School is in compliance with:

- **Membership size.** Over the charter term, the Board has consistently had a membership size that falls within the range outlined in the school's charter and in the Board's bylaws, a minimum of five and maximum of 18 members. The Board currently has nine active members.
- **Required number of monthly meetings.** The Board's bylaws indicate that the Board is to hold six meetings per year. In all years of the retrospective charter term, the Board did hold the required number of monthly meetings, as evidenced by the Board Yearly Meeting Schedule and the reviewed meeting minutes. Required meetings are those which met quorum.
  - The Board has not held the number of Board meetings required by the Charter Schools Act. The Charter Schools Act requires that the Board hold monthly meetings over a period of 12 calendar months per year. The Board has revised its bylaws to reflect this requirement and is committed to having the required number of meetings in the new charter term.
- **Submission of all required documents.** All current Board members have submitted conflict of interest and financial disclosure forms. The documents submitted do not demonstrate conflicts of interest.<sup>24</sup>
- **Posting of minutes and agendas.** The Board has consistently made all Board minutes and agendas available upon request to the public prior to or at Board meetings by posting all materials on the public website, and reminders and materials are made available via the electronic school calendar accessible for parents.
- **Notification of Board Member Resignations/Submission of New Board Members for Approval.** The Board has consistently submitted board resignation notices or new board member credentials within the required five days of change to OSDCP for review and, if necessary, approval.
- **Timely submission of documents.** The Board did consistently submit the Annual Report to the New York State Education Department by the deadline of August 1 (or by the NYSED granted extension date) for each year of the current charter term. The school has posted to its website its annual audit for each year of the charter term, as required in charter law.

As of the review in March 2015, the charter school is in compliance with:

- **Fingerprint clearance.** All staff members have appropriate fingerprint clearance.
- **Teacher certification.** The school has submitted required documentation for teacher certification and is compliant with state requirements for teacher certification. The Charter Schools Act prohibits more than five staff members or more than 30% of the teaching staff from not being certified in accordance with requirements applicable to other public schools.
- **Safety Documents.** The school has submitted the required safety plan. The school has the required number of staff with AED/CPR certification.
- **Immunization.** The school has submitted its required immunization documentation and is in compliance with Department of Health standards of 99% for immunization.
- **Insurance.** The school has submitted appropriate insurance documents to the NYC DOE.
- **Application and Lottery.** For the 2014-2015 school year, the school had an application deadline of April 1, 2014 and lottery date of May 17, 2014, adhering to charter law's requirement of accepting applications up to at least April 1. Over the course of the charter term, the school did consistently adhere to this requirement.

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<sup>24</sup> Source: New York State Education Department Annual Report

- **Fire Emergency.** One or more of the school leaders were trained in General Response Protocols/Fire Emergency Drill Conductor for NYC, as mandated by the NYC Fire Department.
- **Student Discipline Plan.** The school has provided the NYC DOE with a current and complete copy of its Student Discipline Policy for the 2014-2015 academic year. This policy was determined to be compliant with federal law.
- **Timely Submission of Invoicing and Reconciliation Documents.** Over the course of the charter term, the school did consistently submit complete invoicing and reconciliation documents by the associated deadlines.

### Enrollment and Retention Targets

- Amendments to Article 56 of the New York State Consolidated Laws: Education, which relates to Charter Schools, call for charter schools, as a consideration of renewal, “to meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets” for students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who are eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program. The amendments further indicate “Repeated failure to comply with the requirement” as a cause for revocation or termination of the charter.
  - The law directs schools to demonstrate “that it has made extensive efforts to recruit and retain such students” in the event it has not yet met its targets.
  - The NYC DOE, as authorizer, will annually monitor the school’s performance against these targets and the efforts it makes to meet this state requirement.
  - As of the creation of this report, charter school enrollment and retention targets as required by the NYS Charter Schools Act were still in a proposed status; these targets have since been finalized. The information presented below for enrollment is compared to NYC CSD and NYC averages, as well as the recently finalized current enrollment targets developed by NYSED. It should be noted that these targets were developed using a different methodology than that used to develop the school-specific enrollment rates for each special population as presented below.<sup>25</sup>
- In all years of operation, including the most recently completed school year 2013-2014, the New York Center for Autism Charter School:
  - served a lower percentage of students qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Lunch compared to both the CSD 4 and citywide percentages, with the exception of the 2013-2014 school year, in which the school served a higher percentage of students qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Lunch than the citywide rate;
  - served a higher percentage of students with disabilities compared to both the CSD 4 and citywide percentages; and
  - served a lower percentage of English Language Learner students compared to both the CSD 4 and citywide percentages.

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<sup>25</sup> Please see the following website for more information: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/enrollment-retention-targets.html>

## Enrollment of Special Populations

Special Population		2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2013-2014 State Enrollment Target (Current) <sup>26</sup>
Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)	<b>New York Center for Autism Charter School</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>27.3%</b>	<b>87.5%</b>	<b>81.9%</b>
	CSD 4	86.5%	91.1%	92.5%	92.3%	
	NYC	80.6%	82.9%	82.0%	81.5%	
Students with Disabilities (SWD)	<b>New York Center for Autism Charter School</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>
	CSD 4	22.9%	22.7%	24.0%	26.2%	
	NYC	18.5%	17.8%	18.2%	19.4%	
English Language Learners (ELL)	<b>New York Center for Autism Charter School</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>
	CSD 4	15.1%	13.7%	13.2%	12.6%	
	NYC	15.6%	15.2%	14.9%	14.6%	

Additional Enrollment Information				
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Grades Served	Ungraded	Ungraded	Ungraded	Ungraded
CSD(s)	4	4	4	4

<sup>26</sup> Targets were identified for New York Center for Autism Charter School by using CSD 4 as the primary CSD and a grade range of kindergarten through grade ten.

## **Essential Question 4: What are the School's Plans for the Next Charter Term?**

As part of its next charter term the school plans to:

- The school has applied to extend the age range served from students aged five through 19 to students aged five through 21 in the next charter term.
- The school has also requested to increase authorized enrollment from 32 to 40 students in the next charter term.
  - To serve the increasingly adolescent student population (who currently comprise 50% of the student body), the school proposes to secure a Young Adult Program Annex to offer a developmentally and clinically appropriate program that would allow for increased socialization and work internship opportunities that are not available at the current site.
  - Approximately 10 adolescent students who are assessed to be capable of full time work in the community would be served at the Young Adult Program Annex. A Clinical Supervisor/Director of Young Adult Programming would oversee the new site, along with additional staff as needed.
  - The highest need students would remain in the current location, where the school staff could continue to target important skills so that the students would benefit from additional staff and expertise on-site.
  - The school would initially add four students in the first year that the Young Adult Program Annex is operational and another four students the following year.
- With the age expansion and enrollment increase requested, the school would still plan for students to predominantly enter the school at age five, drawn by lottery as per the preferences approved in the school's charter. Staffing increases would be made according to the students' IEPs, with most IEPs requiring a ratio of four students to one teacher and three instructors (4:1:3).
  - Students may, at some point, demonstrate skills that would indicate readiness to benefit from an alternate, less restrictive school environment.
  - For all other students a reduction in the staffing ratio by at least one instructor (e.g. 4:1:2) would be considered by the CSE, school, and parents at age 13, with further reduction considered at the age of 16 (e.g. 4:1:1).

## Part 5: Background on the Charter Renewal Process

### Renewal Process

In the final year of its charter, a NYC DOE Chancellor-authorized charter school seeking renewal must demonstrate its success during the current charter term and establish goals and objectives for the next charter term. Ultimately, the renewal process offers an opportunity for the school community to reflect on its experiences during its prior term, to make a compelling, evidence-based case that it has earned the privilege of an additional charter term and, if renewed, to carry out an ambitious plan for the future.

The NYC DOE does not automatically grant charter renewal, and no charter operator is entitled to renewal. Rather, a school must prove that it has earned renewal and is worthy of continuing the privilege of educating New York City public school students. To make such determinations, the NYC DOE Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships renewal team performs a comprehensive review of the school's academic, operational and fiscal performance over the course of the charter which includes an analysis of the school's renewal application. This application is built around the four essential questions of the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework and includes a retrospective analysis of the school's prior track record as well as a prospective plan for the school. In reviewing this information, a school must be able to demonstrate that it can satisfy the four essential questions of the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework:

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

The school presents evidence to support its application for renewal by providing a compelling response to these overarching questions that demonstrates its students have made significant academic progress, is serving students equitably, has sustainable operations to be successful in the next charter term, and that the school has met the goals and objectives pledged in its current charter. In addition, the school will describe challenges it has faced during its charter term, the strategies that were used to address those challenges and the lessons learned.

While the academic performance of students is the foremost determining factor of a school's success, a school's ability to demonstrate an effective educational program, a financially and operationally viable organization, and a strong learning community with support from stakeholders are also important factors that inform a renewal decision. For more information on how OSDCP makes renewal recommendations to the Chancellor, please see the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework overview in Part 6 of this report.

### Statutory Basis for Renewal

The New York State Charter Schools Act ("the Act") authorizes the creation of a system of charter schools to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and community members to establish and maintain schools that operate independently of existing schools and school districts in order to accomplish the following objectives:

#### **§2850:**

- (a) Improve student learning and achievement;
- (b) Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure;
- (c) Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- (d) Create new professional opportunities for teachers, school administrators and other school personnel;
- (e) Provide parents and students with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and

- (f) Provide schools with a method to change from rule-based to performance based accountability systems by holding the schools established under this article accountable for meeting measurable student achievement results.

When granted, a charter is valid for up to five years. For a school chartered under the Act to operate beyond the initial charter term, the school must seek and obtain renewal of its charter.<sup>27</sup>

The Act states the following regarding the renewal of a school's charter:

**§2851.4:**

Charters may be renewed, upon application, for a term of up to five years in accordance with the provisions of this article for the issuance of such charters pursuant to section twenty-eight hundred fifty-two of this article; provided, however, that a renewal application shall [also] include:

(a) A report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in the charter.

(b) A detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private. Such statement shall be in a form prescribed by the board of regents.

(c) Copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school required by subdivision two of section twenty-eight hundred fifty-seven of this article, including the charter school report cards and the certified financial statements.

(d) Indications of parent and student satisfaction.

(e) The means by which the charter school will meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets as prescribed by the board of regents or the board of trustees of the state university of New York, as applicable, of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program which shall be considered by the charter entity prior to approving such charter school's application for renewal. When developing such targets, the board of regents and the board of trustees of the state university of New York shall ensure (1) that such enrollment targets are comparable to the enrollment figures of such categories of students attending the public schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the charter school is located; and (2) that such retention targets are comparable to the rate of retention of such categories of students attending the public schools within the school district, or in a city school district in a city having a population of one million or more inhabitants, the community school district, in which the proposed charter school would be located.

Such renewal application shall be submitted to the charter entity no later than six months prior to the expiration of the charter; provided, however, that the charter entity may waive such deadline for good cause shown.

The determination of whether to approve a renewal application rests in the sole discretion of a charter school's authorizer.

A school seeking renewal of its charter must submit a renewal application to the charter entity to which the original charter application was submitted.<sup>28</sup> As one such charter entity, the New York City Department of Education institutes a renewal application process that adheres to the Act's renewal standards:

- A report of the progress of the charter school in achieving the educational objectives set forth in its charter;

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<sup>27</sup> See §§ 2851(4) and 2852 of the Act.

<sup>28</sup> See generally §§ 2851(3) and 2851(4).

- A detailed financial statement that discloses the cost of administration, instruction and other spending categories for the charter school that will allow a comparison of such costs to other schools, both public and private;
- Copies of each of the annual reports of the charter school including the charter school report cards and certified financial statements;
- Indications of parent and student satisfaction; and
- The means by which the charter school will meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets as prescribed by the board of regents of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced price lunch program which shall be considered by the charter entity prior to approving such charter school's application for renewal.<sup>29</sup>

Where the NYC DOE approves a renewal application, it is required under the Act to submit the application and a proposed charter to the Board of Regents for its review and approval.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> § 2851(4)(e) added with the 2010 amendments to the Act.

<sup>30</sup> See § 2852(5).

## Part 6: NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework

The Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships team may recommend to the Chancellor three potential outcomes for charter schools applying for renewal: full-term renewal (with or without conditions), short-term renewal (with or without conditions), or non-renewal.

After the OSDCP renewal site visit, the OSDCP team incorporates its findings from the visit into this renewal report. The evidence and findings align to the four essential questions of the NYC DOE accountability framework and may include classroom observations, leadership interviews, assessment results, School Survey results, public hearings and other community feedback, as well as a variety of other data. Schools will be given the opportunity to correct factual errors in this report. If the OSDCP renewal team determines that renewal is not warranted, the school will be informed in writing of the reasons for the non-renewal. If OSDCP approves the renewal application and the Chancellor recommends renewal for the school, prior to the school's charter expiration date, OSDCP will send the renewal report and recommendation along with the school's renewal application and other supporting evidence to the Board of Regents for its approval.

### ***Full-Term Renewal, With or Without Conditions***

In cases where a school has demonstrated exceptional results with its students, a five-year renewal will be granted. A school must show that its program has clearly and consistently demonstrated high academic attainment and/or consistent and significant student academic progress, has met the majority of its charter goals, has demonstrated financial stability, has demonstrated operational viability, has attained sufficient board capacity, and has an educationally sound learning environment in order to gain this type of renewal.

### ***Short Term Renewal, With or Without Conditions***

In cases where a school is up for renewal of its initial charter and has two years or fewer of state-assessment results, or where any school has demonstrated mixed academic results or has uncertain organizational or financial viability, a short-term renewal with conditions may be considered.

### ***Non-Renewal***

Renewal is not automatic. Schools that have not demonstrated significant progress or high levels of student achievement and/or are in violation of their charter will not be renewed.

### ***Grade Expansions or Enrollment Changes***

A school may seek material charter revisions as part of the renewal process. In the case of a grade expansion or change in authorized enrollment, these material charter revisions are considered separately from the charter renewal. Charter renewal, with or without conditions, is not a guarantee of approval for a proposed material charter revision.

## The NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework

To help Chancellor-authorized charter schools better understand what we mean by success for charter schools, the OSDCP team has developed an Accountability Framework built around four essential questions for charter school renewal:

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

Although academic performance is primary, the NYC DOE takes into account a wide variety of factors (as indicated by the framework strands and available evidence detail) when evaluating a school. These factors include academic, fiscal, operational and environmental indicators of a charter school's performance. Additionally, some of the indicators we evaluate relate to expected performance as defined in the New York State Charter Schools Act including evidence of improved student learning and achievement, special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are at-risk of academic failure, use of different and innovative teaching methods, parent and student satisfaction, and enrollment and retention of special student populations. Further detail about the application of the framework to school reflection and evaluation is provided beginning on page 17 of the NYC DOE Chancellor-Authorized Schools Accountability Handbook for 2014-2015.

What follows is a framework that outlines strands, indicators, and potential evidence for each of the four essential questions. The framework identifies what OSDCP looks at in determining whether a school is successful enough to earn a new charter term, with or without conditions, and the duration of the charter term recommended by NYC DOE. As schools use the NYC DOE OSDCP Accountability Framework, they should remember that charter schools exist to deliver improved student achievement for the students they serve, particularly at-risk students, so the schools are high-quality choices for families. This reminder should help a school apply this framework to its own performance analysis, underscoring the state and city's commitment to superior academic performance as the most important factor in a school's performance, while also recognizing the importance of closing the achievement gap and offering high-quality learning opportunities for all students.

### 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
- Meet other rigorous academic goals as stated on school charter
- Demonstrate increasing student achievement/growth
- Are closing the achievement gap for at risk students, including special needs and ELL students
- Are surpassing academic performance measures of DOE identified peer-schools
- Are surpassing academic performance measures compared with district/city proficiency averages

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

- Grades 3-8 NYS ELA Results (absolute and comparative performance, individual student progress, progress for at-risk populations, etc.)
- Grades 3-8 NYS Math Results (absolute and comparative performance, individual student progress, progress for at-risk populations, etc.)
- Grades 4 and 8 NYS Science Results (absolute and comparative performance, individual student progress, progress for at-risk populations, etc.)
- HS 4- and 6-Year Graduation Rates
- Grades 8-12 NYS Regent Exam Results
- 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
- When applicable, NYSAA or other approved alternate assessments results
- Results on state accountability measures
- Charter School Academic Goals
- School-reported internal assessments
- NYC DOE Progress Reports or School Quality Reports<sup>31</sup>

### **1b. Instructionally Sound and 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 and Common Core Learning Standards
- Use instructional models and resources that are consistent with school mission and flexible in addressing the needs of all learners
- Have defined strategies that they can measure and monitor for closing the achievement gap
- Offer defined opportunities for remediation and acceleration
- Utilizes 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
- Have effective strategies and quality instructional programs for addressing students with special needs and ELLs
- Use a defined process for evaluating and supporting curricular tasks, programs and resources for effectiveness and fit with school mission and goals

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

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

<sup>31</sup> Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, the NYC DOE replaced the DOE Progress Report with the DOE School Quality Report. The 2012-2013 school year is the last year NYC public schools will have a Progress Report score. The Progress Report and School Quality Report contain similar indicators of performance.

## 1c. Learning Environment

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

- Provide a safe, respectful, and stable academic environment conducive to student learning (one with efficient transitions and safe hallways, cafeteria, yard, etc.)
- Have a strong academic culture that creates high academic and behavioral expectations in a way that motivates students to consistently give their best effort academically and to actively engage in their own learning and the life of the school
- 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
- Have classrooms where academic risk-taking and student participation is encouraged and supported
- Have 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:

- Classroom observations
- NYC DOE School Survey results (students, parents and teachers)
- School mission and articulated values
- 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)
- Parent complaint/concern information
- Self-administered satisfaction survey results
- Interviews with school leadership, staff, and, if appropriate, students
- Scheduled student engagement opportunities (e.g., student advisory, internships, student government, student led conferences, peer tutoring, peer mediation, etc.)
- School calendar and class schedules

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

### 2a. Mission and Goals

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

- Have an animated mission statement and clearly articulated goals (both academic and non-academic) that staff, students and community embrace
- Demonstrate an active self-evaluation process that involves regular monitoring, an examination of practices based on outcomes against goals, and reporting on progress towards school goals
- Have processes for adjusting strategies in support of goals as appropriate in response to monitoring data

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

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

### 2b. Leadership and Governance Structure

Schools with successful leadership and governance 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 Law and conflict of interest laws, 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
- 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
- Have timely and appropriate access to legal counsel
- Have instructional leadership staffing and support structures that holds staff accountable for student learning outcomes and provides 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 and core operational policies
- School calendar
- Professional development plans
- Stakeholder interviews (board, school leadership and staff)

## 2c. School Climate and Community Engagement

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

- A healthy professional school climate that is collaborative, student-centered, and open to parents and community support
- Employ an effective means of measuring and monitoring core constituency satisfaction (parent, staff, and, when age appropriate, student), including, but not limited to, the NYC DOE School Survey
- Have effective home-school communication practices and engagement strategies to ensure meaningful parent involvement in the learning of their children
- Strong community-based partnerships that support and advocate for the school
- Engage families actively in the life of the school, including advocacy, community engagement, and feedback on school policies and initiatives
- 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
- Share instructional and operational practices with the larger NYC school community and actively seek opportunities for partnering and collaboration
- 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

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

- NYC DOE School Survey satisfaction parent, teacher, and, if appropriate student results
- Student retention and wait list data
- Staff retention data
- Leadership, staff, parent, student interviews
- Student and staff attendance rates
- Parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Parent association meeting calendar and minutes
- Community partnerships and sponsored programs
- Participation in NYC DOE initiatives and efforts to collaborate/partner with other NYC schools
- Parent and community feedback via public hearings, renewal calls to parents, etc.
- Community outreach documents (newsletters, announcements, invitations, etc.)
- 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
- Student/Family and Staff Handbooks

## 2d. Operational Health

Schools that are effective, sustainable organizations have many of the characteristics below:

- A safe, clean and appropriately resourced educational facility with all appropriate services specified in charter and mandated by appropriate law and regulations
- Demonstrate efficient and orderly daily operations
- Have appropriate insurance coverage and insurance and facility documents
- An effective process for recruiting, hiring, compensating, monitoring, supporting, and evaluating school leadership and staff
- A flexible, data-driven approach to professional development for all staff
- Consistently meet student enrollment and retention targets as established by SED (applicable to schools renewed after 2010)
- Communications with NYC DOE are timely, comprehensive, and appropriate
- If applicable, school relationship with a charter management organization identified in charter and supported by a management agreement that spells out services, responsibilities, accountability reporting, performance expectations, and fees

Evidence of an operationally viable organization may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Required facility documents (lease, certificate of occupancy, fire and safety inspections, etc.)
- Appropriate insurance documents
- Operational policies and procedures
- Operational organizational chart
- Secure storage areas for student and staff records
- Policies/protocols for maintaining secure records
- School safety plan
- Immunization completion rate information
- Appropriate AED/CPR certifications

## 2e. Financial Sustainability

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

- Maintain annual budgets that meet all short- and long-term financial responsibilities with available revenues
- Provide rigorous oversight of financial and operational responsibilities, at 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
- Consistently clean financial audits and compliant escrow accounts
- If applicable, strong, accountable partnerships with management organizations and other partners and significant vendors to support delivery of charter school's design and academic program
- School leadership and Board maintain effective internal controls of finances to ensure integrity of financial management and a proactive approach to mitigating risk
- School leadership and Board oversee financial and operational responsibilities in a manner that keeps the school's mission and academic goals central to decision-making
- Demonstrate financial planning for future school years, including per-pupil and space-related cost projections

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 audits, escrow accounts and other fiscal reporting documents
- Financial leader(s) resume and accountability documents
- Financial and operational organizational chart
- Contracts or Memos of Understanding (MOUs) for significant partnerships and vendor relationships

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

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

Schools in substantial compliance with the school's charter and charter agreement have the characteristics below:

- Implement 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
- Implement 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 Comprehensive Review reports
- Board meetings, agendas and minutes
- Leadership/Board and staff interviews
- Public hearings (renewal or material revision hearings)

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

Schools in substantial compliance with federal and state law have the characteristics below:

- Meet all legal requirements for Title I and IDEA regulations and reporting
- Meet or exceed enrollment and retention targets for Free and Reduced Price Lunch, ELL and Special Education students to those of their community school district of location<sup>32</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 enrollment process and annual waiting lists with integrity
- Employ instructional staff with appropriate security clearances and meet all 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 NYSED Annual Report
- Student recruitment plan and resources
- Student management policies and promotion and retention policies
- Student/Family Handbook
- Student discipline policy and 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

<sup>32</sup> School-specific targets for enrollment and retention were developed by the NY State Education Department. This requirement of the New York State Charter Schools Act applies to schools renewed after 2010.

### 3c. Applicable Regulations

Schools in substantial compliance with applicable regulations have the characteristics below:

- Safe and secure facilities with no significant compliance concerns
- Consistently clean annual audits, up-to-date escrow accounts, and complete 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 comply with NYC DOE OSDCP's requirements for reporting changes in board membership and securing approval for new board members
- Inform NYC DOE OSDCP, and where required, receive OSDCP 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
- Stakeholder interviews

## 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, a school may consider various growth options: replication, expansion to new grades or increased enrollment, or alteration of its 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 determine community needs and to communicate regarding the school's 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 revision or merger applications
- 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 (for example, human resource policies for growing your own talent, 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)
- School develops contingency plans especially for facilities or financial scenarios

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

- Charter renewal application
- Board roster and resumes
- Board committees and minutes
- School organizational 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 without major changes through expansion or replication, 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 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

## Appendix A: Additional Accountability Data

### NYC DOE Accountability Reports

[Annual Comprehensive Report 2013-2014](#)

[Annual Comprehensive Report 2012-2013](#)

[Annual Site Visit Report 2011-2012](#)