



# New York State Education Department

## *Renewal Site Visit Report* *2017-2018*

**Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls**

**Visit Date: November 9, 2017**  
**Date of Report: May 29, 2018**

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## SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

### Charter School Summary<sup>1</sup>

<b>Name of Charter School</b>	Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls
<b>Board Chair</b>	Martha Snyder
<b>School Leader</b>	Marcus Puccioni
<b>District of location</b>	Albany City School District
<b>Opening Date</b>	September 9, 2002
<b>Charter Terms</b>	Initial: 01/10/2001 – 01/09/2006 1st Renewal Term: 01/10/2006 – 01/09/2011 2nd Renewal Term: 01/11/2011 – 06/30/2015 3rd Renewal Term: 07/01/2015 – 06/30/2018
<b>Current Term Authorized Grades/ Maximum Authorized Enrollment</b>	k-5/325
<b>Management Company</b>	N/A
<b>Educational Partners</b>	N/A
<b>Facilities</b>	250 Central Avenue, Albany, NY 12206
<b>Mission Statement</b>	<p><i>The mission of the Brighter Choice Charter Schools is to ensure that Brighter Choice Charter School scholars have the same opportunities for future success as scholars attending the best public schools in the region. There are 3 significant components to achieving this mission:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Exemplary instruction that ensures competency and mastery in reading, writing and mathematics.</i></li> <li>• <i>Focus on the development of social, behavioral, and organizational skills necessary for future school success.</i></li> <li>• <i>An education beyond the basics that includes performing arts, visual arts, science, and history.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Key Design Elements</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An intense and serious focus on academic achievement</li> <li>2. An equally rigorous standard for scholar behavior, with an emphasis on core values</li> <li>3. Single-gender classroom instruction</li> <li>4. An extended school day and extended school year</li> <li>5. Mandatory school uniforms</li> <li>6. A high level of parental/guardian participation in the life of the school</li> <li>7. Frequent standardized testing, beginning in Kindergarten.</li> </ol>
<b>Revision History</b>	<p>In April 2016, the Board of Regents approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A merger with Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys;</li> <li>• An increase in grade span from K-4 to K-5; and</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The information in this section was provided by the NYS Education Department Charter School Office.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increase in maximum enrollment from 270 to 325 students.</li> </ul>
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**Renewal Outcomes**

The following renewal outcomes are possible:

- **Full-Term Renewal:** A school’s charter may be renewed for the maximum term of five years. For a school to be eligible for a full-term renewal, during the current charter term the school must have compiled a strong and compelling record of meeting or exceeding Benchmark 1, and at the time of the renewal analysis, have met substantially all other performance benchmarks in the Framework.
- **Short-Term Renewal:** A school’s charter may be renewed for a shorter term, typically of three years. As discussed above, the Regents will place an even greater emphasis on student performance for schools applying for their second or subsequent renewal, which is consistent with the greater time that a school has been in operation and the corresponding increase in the quantity and quality of student achievement data that the school has generated. In order for a school to be eligible for short-term renewal, a school must either:
  - (a) have compiled a mixed or limited record of meeting Benchmark 1, but at the time of the renewal analysis, have met substantially all of the other performance benchmarks in the Framework which will likely result in the school’s being able to meet Benchmark 1 with the additional time that short-term renewal permits, **or**
  - (b) have compiled an overall record of meeting Benchmark 1, but falls far below meeting one or more of the other performance benchmarks in the Framework.
- **Non-Renewal:** A school’s charter will not be renewed if the school does not apply for renewal or the school fails to meet the criteria for either full-term or short-term renewal. In the case of non-renewal, a school’s charter will be terminated upon its expiration and the school will be required to comply with the Charter School Office’s Closing Procedures to ensure an orderly closure by the end of the school year.

**Please Note:** The Regents may include additional terms, conditions, and/or requirements in a school’s Full-Term or Short-Term Renewal charter to address specific situations or areas of concern. For example, a school may meet the standards for full-term renewal or short-term renewal with regard to its educational success, but may be required to address organizational deficiencies that need to be corrected but do not prevent the Regents from making the required legal findings for renewal. A school may also meet the standards for full-term renewal or short-term renewal of only a portion of its educational program (e.g., for the elementary school program, but not the middle school program). Such additional terms and/or requirements may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on the number of students and grades to be served by the school, additional student performance metrics, heightened reporting requirements, or specific corrective action.

## School Characteristics

### Enrollment for the Current Charter Term

	Year 1 2015 to 2016	Year 2 2016 to 2017	Year 3 2017 to 2018
<b>Grade Configuration</b>	Grades K -4	Grades K - 5	Grades K - 5
<b>Total Approved Enrollment</b>	270	325	325
<b>Actual Enrollment</b>	284	317	338 <sup>2</sup>

### Proposed Enrollment for the Renewal Charter Term

	Year 1 2018 to 2019	Year 2 2019 to 2020	Year 3 2020 to 2021	Year 4 2021 to 2022	Year 5 2022 to 2023
<b>Grade Configuration</b>	Grades K - 5	Grades K -5	Grades K - 5	Grades K -5	Grades K - 5
<b>Total Approved Enrollment</b>	325	325	325	325	325

## METHODOLOGY

A one-day renewal site visit was conducted at Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls (BCCSG) on November 9, 2017. In conjunction with visit, the NYSED Charter School Office (CSO) team conducted interviews with the board of trustees, school leadership team, parents, the school climate team, and the special student populations team. In cooperation with school leadership, the CSO administered an anonymous online survey to teachers.

The team conducted 18 classroom observations in kindergarten through Grade 5. The observations were approximately 15 minutes in length and conducted jointly with the principal and assistant principal/director of curriculum.

The documents and data reviewed by the team before, during, and after the site visit included the following:

- **Renewal Application**
- **Academic data**

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Self-reported by the school in the Renewal Site Visit Workbook

- **School submitted Renewal Site Visit Workbook**
- **School submitted Annual Reports**
- **Current organizational chart**
- **A master school schedule**
- **Map of school with room numbers and teacher names**
- **Board materials (roster, minutes,)**
- **Board self-evaluation processes and documents**
- **Student/family handbook**
- **Staff handbook and personnel policies**
- **A list of major assessments**
- **Teacher and administrator evaluation processes**
- **Interventions offered at the school**
- **School-conducted parent survey, and NYSED teacher survey**
- **Professional development plans and schedules**
- **Efforts towards achieving enrollment and retention targets**
- **School submitted Annual Reports**
- **Original charter application**
- **A list of family events for 2016-2017**
- **Scholar Motivation System**
- **Leadership evaluations**

## BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The Performance Framework, which is part of the oversight plan included in the Charter Agreement for each school, outlines 10 Performance Framework benchmarks in three key areas of charter school performance:

- Educational Success
- Organizational Soundness
- Faithfulness to Charter and Law

Observational findings from the review of the renewal application, supporting data, and the site visit will be presented in alignment with the [Performance Framework](#) Benchmarks and Indicators according to the rating scale below, although not all indicators will necessarily be assessed on every site visit. A brief summary of the school's strengths will precede the benchmark analysis. Each benchmark will be rated; however, the report narrative will highlight those indicators not fully met by the school.

Level	Description
<b>Exceeds</b>	The school meets the performance benchmark; potential exemplar in this area.
<b>Meets</b>	The school generally meets the performance benchmark; few concerns are noted.
<b>Approaches</b>	The school does not meet the performance benchmark; a number of concerns are noted.
<b>Falls Far Below</b>	The school falls far below the performance benchmark; significant concerns are noted.

For the site visit conducted on November 9, 2017 at BCCSG, see the following Performance Framework benchmark scores and discussion.

**New York State Education Department  
Charter School Performance Framework Rating**

Performance Benchmark		Level
<b>Educational Success</b>	<b>Benchmark 1: Student Performance:</b> The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic trends toward proficiency, proficiency and high school graduation. At all grade levels and all assessments, scoring proficiently means achieving a performance level of 3 or higher (high school Regents and Common Core Regents exam score of 65 or higher).	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning:</b> School leaders have systems in place designed to cultivate shared accountability and high expectations and that lead to students’ well-being, improved academic outcomes, and educational success. The school has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to the New York State Learning Standards (NYSLS) for all students. Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement:</b> The school has systems in place to support students’ social and emotional health and to provide for a safe and respectful learning environment. Families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being. Families and students are satisfied with the school’s academics and the overall leadership and management of the school.	Meets
<b>Organizational Soundness</b>	<b>Benchmark 4: Financial Condition:</b> The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.	Approaches
	<b>Benchmark 5: Financial Management:</b> The school operates in a fiscally sound manner with realistic budgets pursuant to a long-range financial plan, appropriate internal controls and procedures, and in accordance with state law and generally accepted accounting practices.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance:</b> The board of trustees provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school while maintaining policies, establishing performance goals, and implementing systems to ensure academic success, organizational viability, board effectiveness and faithfulness to the terms of its charter.	Approaches
	<b>Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity:</b> The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure, clearly delineated roles for staff, management, and board members. The school has systems and protocols that allow for the successful implementation, evaluation, and improvement of its academic program and operations.	Meets
<b>Faithfulness to Charter &amp; Law</b>	<b>Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements:</b> The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.	Meets
	<b>Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention:</b> The school is meeting or making annual progress toward meeting the enrollment plan outlined in its charter and its enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced priced lunch program; or has demonstrated that it has made extensive good faith efforts to attract, recruit, and retain such students.	Approaches
	<b>Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance:</b> The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.	Falls Far Below



## **Summary of Findings**

BCCSG provides an academic program aligned with the New York State Learning Standards (NYSLS) that fulfills the school's mission. The school implements a comprehensive behavior management system and character education curriculum that complements the academic program and results in a safe, orderly and productive learning environment. On state exams, economically disadvantaged (ED) students at BCCSG outperform similar students in the Albany City School District (ACSD) and approach state averages. The school enrolls fewer students with disabilities (SWDs) and English language learners (ELLs) than the district and the state. Therefore, due to data suppression requirements, direct comparisons of the academic performance for all students as well as for SWDs and ELLs are not able to be made.

While the Brighter Choice Elementary Charter Schools' (BCECS) Board of Trustees has corrected errors identified by the authorizer, it has not fully put into place procedures to actively maintain awareness of and ensure adherence to its by-laws, charter requirements, and state and federal regulations including the Open Meetings Law (OML) and, as a result, remains out of compliance in several areas. The board oversees two schools that have consistently enrolled fewer SWDs and ELLs than its district of location. While BCCSG enrolled a higher number of ELLs this year than previously, the board does not have strong systems in place to identify the effectiveness of its recruitment and retention strategies.

In addition to issues around compliance as related by the CSO to BCECS, the school has had numerous errors around data reporting including the submission of data to Student Information Repository System (SIRS), documentation submitted to the CSO in coordination with the renewal visit, and annual report submissions. While some have been corrected, it is unclear if the school has a system in place moving forward to prevent others from occurring again.

Overall, the school's financial well-being has been improving over the course of the charter term. The school's financial condition is not yet stable, although the indicator it has been improving year over year over the course of the charter term. BCCSG is meeting the financial management benchmark.

While leadership roles and responsibilities overlap at BCCSG, stakeholders understand the division of duties across the school. The school consistently implements systems, routines, and procedures that result in smoother, more efficient operations. Teachers describe the professional climate as supportive and encouraging. Over the charter term, the school has experienced high rates of teacher turnover, which they report have been lower this year. Frequent, regular family-school communication contributes to high levels of satisfaction with the school.

## Benchmark 1: Student Performance

*The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic trends toward proficiency, proficiency and high school graduation. At all grade levels and all assessments, scoring proficiently means achieving a performance level of 3 or higher (high school Regents and Common Core Regents exam score of 65 or higher).*

### Finding: Meets

#### Summative Evidence for Benchmark 1:

Over the current charter term, the academic performance of students at the BCCSG approaches or meets several of the indicators defined under Benchmark 1 of the Charter School Performance Framework. However, because the school enrolls fewer ELLs and SWDs than ACSD and the state, test results shown in Table 2 do not reflect comparable populations. Therefore, the data are insufficient to draw accurate conclusions about the performance of the school compared to ACSD or the state.

#### Indicator 1: All Schools

##### 1.a.i. Accountability - ESEA Accountability Designation:

For each of the three years of the charter term, BCCSG earned an ESEA designation of “Good Standing.”

##### 1.b.i. Similar Schools Comparison – Comparative Proficiency:

According to the school’s comparison analysis shown in the table below, BCCSG students have performed below students in similar schools in both ELA and math across two years of the current charter term.

ELA Percent Proficient	2015-2016	2016-2017
BCCSG	25%	26%
Similar Schools	30%	37%

Math Percent Proficient	2015-2016	2016-2017
BCCSG	33%	23%
Similar Schools	40%	38%

#### Indicator 2: Elementary/Middle School Outcomes

##### 2.a.i. Trending Toward Proficiency – Aggregate Standards-Based Trend Toward Proficiency:

Based on the school’s calculations, fewer students are trending toward proficiency in 2016-2017 (36%) than in 2015-2016 (57%).

##### 2.a.ii. Trending Toward Proficiency - Subgroup Standards-Based Trend Toward Proficiency:

Trends toward proficiency for ED students parallel the school’s overall results. The school reported that no students in either the ELL or SWD subgroups had a score for both 2015- 2016 and 2016-2017, so trends could not be calculated.

2.b.i. Proficiency - Aggregate School Level Proficiency for All Students: See Table 1 below.

In the aggregate, BCCSG students perform slightly better than their peers in ACSD in ELA and while they are performing above the district in math, the number has dropped from 16 to 5 points better from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 (Table 1). In both ELA and math, BCCSG students perform below the state.

Table 1: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes for All Students:  
School, District, & NYS Level Aggregates

All Students	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2014-2015	17%	14%	+3	32%	-15	29%	16%	+13	43%	-14
2015-2016	25%	19%	+6	41%	-16	33%	17%	+16	44%	-11
2016-2017	26%	19%	+7	40%	-14	23%	18%	+5	45%	-22

2.b.ii. Proficiency – Subgroup School Level Proficiency: See Tables 2-4 below.

As noted in the accompanying tables, BCCSG enrolls a significantly smaller population of SWD and ELLs than the district so that valid comparisons between the school and the district are difficult. The ED subgroup at BCCSG performed above ACSD but below the state for the 2016-2017 academic year. Comparisons for the ED population to 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 may not be accurate due to reporting errors by the school on this population.

Table 2: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup –  
SWDs: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

SWDs	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2014-2015	*	1%	N/A	7%	N/A	*	1%	N/A	15%	N/A
2015-2016	*	1%	N/A	10%	N/A	*	2%	N/A	15%	N/A
2016-2017	*	1%	N/A	10%	N/A	*	2%	N/A	15%	N/A

\*Data suppressed by NYSED on the NYS Report Card

Table 3: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup –  
ELLs: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

ELLs	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2014-2015	*	1%	N/A	6%	N/A	*	5%	N/A	16%	N/A
2015-2016	-	3%	N/A	7%	N/A	-	9%	N/A	15%	N/A
2016-2017	*	7%	N/A	7%	N/A	*	9%	N/A	16%	N/A

\*Data suppressed by NYSED on the NYS Report Card

Table 4: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup –  
ED Students: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

EDs	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2014-2015	*	8%	N/A	21%	N/A	*	9%	N/A	31%	N/A
2015-2016	23%	12%	+11	30%	-7	32%	10%	+22	33%	-1
2016-2017	24%	11%	+13	29%	-5	23%	10%	+13	33%	-10

\*Data suppressed by NYSED on the NYS Report Card

2.b.iii. Proficiency – Grade Level Proficiency: See Table 5 and 6 below.

Grade level proficiency shows wide fluctuations from year to year. For example, 13% of third graders were proficient in ELA in 2014-2015 and as fourth graders in 2015-2016, 32% reach proficiency, dropping to 20% as fifth graders in 2016-2017. Proficiency rates in mathematics showed similar wide variation, with 31% of 2014-2015 third graders proficient, rising to 46% proficiency as fourth graders in 2015-2016, dropping to 17% proficient as fifth graders on the most recent tests (2016-2017). According to the school, no major changes in population or program could account for the fluctuations.

Table 5: Grade Level Proficiency for All Students: 2014-2015

	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2014-2015										
Grade 3	13%	14%	-1	32%	-19	31%	15%	+16	42%	-11
Grade 4	20%	14%	+6	33%	-13	27%	16%	+11	43%	-16

Table 6: Grade Level Proficiency for All Students: 2015-2016

	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2015-2016										
Grade 3	19%	19%	0	42%	-23	21%	17%	+4	44%	-23
Grade 4	32%	19%	+13	41%	-9	46%	16%	+30	45%	+1

Table 7: Grade Level Proficiency for All Students: 2016-2017

	ELA					Math				
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance to ACSD	NYS	Variance to NYS
2016-2017										
Grade 3	32%	20%	+12	43%	-11	30%	24%	+6	48%	-18
Grade 4	21%	20%	+1	41%	-20	17%	14%	+3	43%	-26
Grade 5	20%	17%	+3	35%	-15	17%	15%	+2	43%	-26

## Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning

*School leaders have systems in place designed to cultivate shared accountability and high expectations and that lead to students' well-being, improved academic outcomes, and educational success. The school has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to the New York State Learning Standards (NYSL) for all students. Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.*

### Finding: Meets

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school has a documented curriculum that is aligned to the NYSL.</li> <li>b. Teachers use unit and lesson plans that introduce complex materials, stimulate higher order thinking, and build deep conceptual understanding and knowledge around specific content.</li> <li>c. The curriculum is aligned horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and vertically between grades.</li> <li>d. The curriculum is differentiated to provide opportunities for all students to master grade-level skills and concepts.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Instruction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school staff has a common understanding of high-quality instruction, and observed instructional practices align to this understanding.</li> <li>b. Instructional delivery fosters engagement with all students.</li> </ul>
3. <i>Assessment and Program Evaluation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school uses a balanced system of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments.</li> <li>b. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve student outcomes.</li> <li>c. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program, and modifies the program accordingly.</li> </ul>
4. <i>Supports for Diverse Learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school provides supports to meet the academic needs for all students, including but not limited to: students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students.</li> <li>b. The school has systems to monitor the progress of individual students and facilitate communication between interventionists and classroom teachers regarding the needs of individual students.</li> </ul>

### Summative Evidence for Benchmark 2:

BCCSG has adopted a rigorous curriculum in ELA and mathematics aligned with the NYSL and has established instructional practices and routines that engage students in learning activities that reflect the school's expectations for high achievement. The school has systems in place to address the needs of its population of SWDs and ELLs.

BCCSG implements the Engage NY modules for ELA in kindergarten through Grade 5, along with the Jan Richardson *Next Step Forward* guided reading program (Scholastic) and *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI)

(Fountas and Pinnell). The school divides the daily schedule to include separate ELA and ELA/writing, guided reading, and Response to Intervention (RTI)/Leveled Literacy segments to accommodate the range of standards and topics in the ELA curriculum. Students have a dedicated time in the school day to focus on writing, and the school adopted the *6 Traits* writing program this year as the curriculum tool for those lessons.

In mathematics, the school implements the Engage NY curriculum modules, *A Story of Units*. The extension period in the school day allows teachers the flexibility to reteach or revisit math topics in need of reinforcement. During the focus group, school leaders explained that teachers in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade have begun implementing some components of guided math in their lessons to allow them to work with students in small groups to target instruction according to student need.

In the leadership focus group, school leaders reported that teachers have regularly modified the Engage NY modules to select those that are most engaging and most important to enable students to meet the learning standards for their grade. In the leadership focus group, school leaders explained that teachers implement one unit per month and recognized that they may need to add standards if they aren't explicitly highlighted in the curriculum for that module. School leaders stated that teachers find it difficult to move away from a straight content focus of their lessons toward the complex learning intended by the standard. In the focus group, school leaders indicated that the goal for this year is to pare down the breadth of the curriculum and increase the depth of understanding expected of students.

To monitor the fidelity of implementation of the curriculum, school leaders in the focus group described how they review and provide feedback on lesson plans prepared a week in advance by each grade level team. School leaders reported that they and the instructional coach visit classes regularly to ensure that the plans are being implemented as intended and to identify areas where teachers need additional support.

Members of the instructional leadership team participating in the focus group explained that they established a common set of instructional practices including a common board configuration that includes the learning target for each subject written as an "I can . . ." statement, as well as an agenda for the lesson activities. In guided reading lessons, students work in centers, independently or with the teacher. These common elements were evident across the 18 lessons observed by the team. In addition, team members noted that students demonstrated awareness of classroom routines and expectations, and classrooms were organized, safe, and well-managed. Lesson plans or unit outlines were available for most classes for team review. The team observed two teachers in each of the guided reading lessons in kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 and in the fourth-grade classes, either a reading specialist (K, 1, 2) or a special educator (Grade 4). Both teachers worked with small groups of students who appeared to be purposefully chosen. Other instructional models were observed, including rotating stations in which student groups circulated through a teacher-defined set of activities, including one group of students working with the teacher directly. In a literature lesson, the teacher implemented a carousel design in which student groups circulated to enter inferences and evidence about a characters' motivation over different events in the class novel.

In most of the 18 lessons observed, the team observed evidence of teachers communicating the lesson objective either in writing or orally, checking for understanding, and providing feedback to students. In 16 of the 18 classes, the team noted all students participating in the learning activity and actively engaged in the lesson with two instances where students were less than attentive during their independent work

time. Lessons were consistently implemented to maximize time for learning, and teachers maintained a brisk but appropriate pace for the lesson.

According to documents provided by the school, BCCSG administers formative, diagnostic, and summative assessments to identify students in need of support and to track progress toward curriculum goals. In the focus group interview, school leaders explained that teachers use classroom based assessments, such as tests, quizzes, and exit tickets, to determine what to reteach during the extension period. Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments guide teachers' grouping of students for guided reading and math and to identify those needing additional intervention as part of the school's RTI process. AIMSweb and NWEA tests provide evidence of progress toward grade level proficiency. According to school leaders, teachers use released items from the New York State tests to develop interim assessments, which are administered two to three times per year in order to provide students with experience in the format and design of the state tests and to assess mastery. School leaders in the focus group explained that they continue to be challenged to find internal assessments that more accurately predict performance on state assessments.

During the focus group, school leaders described several changes in the academic program which were made for 2017-2018 in light of data from the multiple assessments it administers, including adding the NWEA test in reading and math to identify specific strengths and weaknesses. BCCSG instructional leaders reported that teachers are encouraged to continue modifying the modules to focus intently on the grade level standards, and the school adopted the *6 Traits* program as the framework for writing instruction.

In the leadership focus group, school leaders acknowledged the small numbers of SWDs and ELLs make it difficult to draw reliable conclusions about the effectiveness of programs and supports for those students based on state assessment results. School leaders explained that the actionable data they monitor closely is progress toward the students' Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals rather than their progress on the state tests. According to participants in the special student populations focus group, two of the school's three students with IEPs are in fourth grade, and the two special education teachers push in to those classes, one in math and one in ELA. In addition, the special education and ESL teachers work with students in small groups inside and outside of the classroom as dictated by language level and needs. During the BCECS focus group, board members reported that they expanded the part time ESL teacher to full time this year to accommodate the higher number of kindergarten enrollees who are ELLs.



**Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate and Family Engagement**

*The school has systems in place to support students’ social and emotional health and to provide for a safe and respectful learning environment. Families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being. Families and students are satisfied with the school’s academics and the overall leadership and management of the school.*

**Finding: Meets**

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Behavior Management and Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school has a clear approach to behavioral management, including a written discipline policy.</li> <li>b. The school appears safe and all school constituents are able to articulate how the school community maintains a safe environment.</li> <li>c. The school has systems in place to ensure that the environment is free from harassment and discrimination.</li> <li>d. Classroom environments are conducive to learning and generally free from disruption.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Family Engagement and Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Teachers communicate with parents to discuss students’ strengths and needs.</li> <li>b. The school assesses family and student satisfaction using strategies such as surveys, feedback sessions, community forums, or participation logs, and considers results when making schoolwide decisions.</li> <li>c. The school has a systematic process for responding to parent or community concerns.</li> <li>d. The school shares school-level academic data with the broader school community to promote transparency and accountability among parents, students and school constituents.</li> </ul>
3. <i>Social-Emotional Supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. School leaders collect and use data to track the socio-emotional needs of students.</li> <li>b. School leaders collect and use data regarding the impact of programs designed to support students’ social and emotional health.</li> </ul>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 3:**

BCCSG implements a structured program to support students’ social and emotional health, one of the core elements of the school’s mission. Onsite, the team observed that the school’s behavior management system appeared to be consistently applied and contributed to a productive and safe learning environment. Interviews with parents, as well as the teacher survey conducted by NYSED, describe collaboration between parents and BCCSG staff to ensure students’ academic success and social-emotional well-being.

BCCSG staff participating in the student support focus group described their actions to fulfill the school’s commitment in its mission to develop the “social, emotional and organizational skills necessary for future school success.” The school includes dedicated time in the schedule to the *Second Step* social emotional learning program, with lessons suited to each grade level presented by the school’s Social Emotional Learning Coordinator and reinforced by classroom teachers during daily morning meeting. In the focus group, BCCSG staff explained that the content of lessons in the curriculum presents students with

opportunities to practice strategies for dealing with new situations, interpersonal interactions, and managing their emotions.

In the school climate focus group, staff members explained that the *Second Step* character education lessons complement the school's behavior management program. The BCCSG "Scholar Motivation System" is based on the principles of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) and aims to help students remain in or return to class as promptly as possible. The steps in the strategy are referred to as RULER – recognize, understand, label, express, regulate. As described by the focus group participants, and observed by the team, teachers designate a "recovery area" in their classroom with a desk and grade level appropriate graphics to help students name their feelings. Students complete a reflection sheet to demonstrate their understanding of their emotions and their strategy for dealing with it productively. The focus group participants explained that students who are unable to recover in the classroom are sent to the Inspiration Room (IR) and meet with the dean of students to resolve the concern. Parents are notified when a child visits the IR, and the dean, counselor, and social emotional learning coordinator track visits during regular meetings of the Behavior Intervention Team (BIT). Based on their review of data and consultation with the teacher and parents, the BIT may develop a behavior support plan for the student or identify the students for closer monitoring through their tiered behavioral intervention process. As described by the focus group participants, the school established a system of motivations to encourage students to persist in their efforts to maintain positive behavior ranging from regular 'breaks' which might include a visit with the counselor or dean, to tickets for chances to earn dress down days, to special celebrations.

With its renewal application, the school submitted a formal discipline policy which outlines the rights and responsibilities of students and families and details infractions and options for consequences. Board minutes indicate that the BCECS board approved the policy; however, the revised policy has not received SED review and is pending approval.

Parents in the focus group expressed enthusiastic approval of the school's strategies to promote their child's academic success as well as their growth in confidence and development of positive character traits. Parents reported that frequent two-way communication with the school occurs via daily reports on academics and behavior in each child's folder, email and text messages between the teacher and family, as well as flyers and postings on social media (Facebook, Instagram). Parents offered special praise for Class Dojo, an app-based tool for teachers to record comments on student activities in real time which can be accessed by parents on their cell phones.

The school administered a parent survey in the fall of 2017, which was strongly positive with 97% assigning the school a grade of A or B. Responses to the statement, "Issues of student harassment or bullying are handled" received slightly lower agreement, 84% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 11% choosing 'neither' and 5% disagreeing. Several parents attending the focus group shared anecdotes describing their child's conflicts and concerns being handled promptly by the school.

Parent participation in school events has been high according to school staff. Staff reported running out of activity tickets at a recent harvest festival due to the high number of attendees and the need for a change in venue for the school's black history event which hosted over 500 people last year. Both parents in the focus group and staff members described the positive impact on family-school relationships resulting from these activities.

In their respective focus groups, school leaders and board members cited the percentage of families who re-enroll their children in the school as evidence of parent satisfaction. As noted under Benchmark 9, the school retained 70% of its students between 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, slightly higher than the district retention rate of 66%. Among the special populations, the same percentage of ED students, 70%, returned to the school, slightly more than the 64% who returned to ACSD. The numbers of ELLs and SWDs enrolled at BCCSG are too small to make valid comparisons with the district.

**Benchmark 4: Financial Condition**  
*The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.*

**Finding: Approaches**

Important Notes:

- The key financial indicators used to evaluate this benchmark will be presented within a separate fiscal dashboard instrument that will provide context for the school’s performance on each of the metrics, outline the specific targets for each metric, and also provide additional subsidiary detail on each calculation.
- Unless otherwise indicated, financial data is derived from the school’s annual independently audited financial statements.

<b>1. Near-Term Indicators:</b>	
1a.	Current Ratio
1b.	Unrestricted Days Cash
1c.	Enrollment Variance
1d.	Composite Score
<b>2. Sustainability Indicators:</b>	
2a.	Total Margin
2b.	Debt to Asset Ratio
2c.	Debt Service Coverage Ratio

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 4:  
Financial Condition**

BCCSG appears to be in improving financial condition as evidenced by performance on key indicators derived from the school’s independently audited financial statements.

The CSO reviews the financial performance and management of charter schools using quantitative and qualitative methods. Near-term indicators, such as the current ratio and unrestricted days cash, are measures of liquidity and of the charter school’s capacity to maintain operations. Long-term indicators, such as total margin and debt-to asset ratio, are measures of the charter school’s capacity to remain viable and to meet financial obligations.

## **Overall Financial Outlook**

A composite score is an overall measure of financial health calculated by the Department's Office of Audit Services. This score is based on a weighting of primary reserves, equity, and net income. A charter school with a score between 1.5 and 3.0 is considered to be in strong financial health. BCCSG's composite score for 2016-2017 is 0.9. The table below shows the school's composite scores from 2013-2014 to 2016-2017.

**BCCSG's Composite Scores  
2013-2014 to 2016-2017**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Composite Score</i>
2016-2017	0.9
2015-2016	0.1
2014-2015	-0.3
2013-2014	-0.6

Source: NYSED Office of Audit Services

## **Near-Term Indicators**

Near-term indicators of financial health are used to understand the current financial performance and viability of the school. The CSO uses three measures:

The current ratio is a financial ratio that measures whether or not a charter school has enough resources to pay its debts over the next 12 months. The ratio is mainly used to give an idea of the school's ability to pay back its short-term liabilities (debt and payables) with its short-term assets (cash, inventory, receivables). The higher the current ratio, the more capable the school is of paying its obligations, with a ratio under 1.0 indicating concern. For 2016-2017, BCCSG had a current ratio of 0.9.

Unrestricted cash measures, in days, whether the charter school can meet operating expenses without receiving new income. Charter schools typically strive to maintain at least 90 days of cash on hand. For fiscal year 2016-2017, BCCSG operated with 41 days of unrestricted cash.

Enrollment maximization measures whether or not a charter school is meeting its enrollment projections, thereby generating sufficient revenue to fund ongoing operations. Actual enrollment that is over 85 percent is considered reasonable. BCCSG's enrollment maximization for 2016-2017 was at 98 percent.

## **Long-Term Indicators**

A charter school's *debt to asset ratio* measures the extent to which the school relies on borrowed funds to finance its operations. It is calculated as total liabilities divided by total assets. A ratio of 0.9 or less meets a standard of low risk. For 2016-2017, BCCSG's debt to asset ratio was 1.0.

Total *margin* measures the deficit or surplus a charter school yields out of its total revenues; in other words, whether or not the school is living within its available resources. Total margin is calculated as net income divided by total revenue. A total margin that is positive indicates low risk. For 2016-2017, BCCSG's total margin was 14 percent.

#### **Benchmark 5: Financial Management**

*The school operates in a fiscally sound manner with realistic budgets pursuant to a long-range financial plan, appropriate internal controls and procedures, and in accordance with state law and generally accepted accounting practices.*

#### **Finding: Meets**

Renewal is based on evidence that the following indicators are generally present:

1. The school has an accurate and functional accounting system that includes monthly budgets.
2. The school sets budget objectives and regularly analyzes its budget in relation to those objectives.
3. The school has allocated budget surpluses in a manner that is fiscally sound and directly attends to the social and academic needs of the students attending the school.
4. The school has and follows a written set of fiscal policies.
5. The school has complied with state and federal financial reporting requirements.
6. The school has and is maintaining appropriate internal controls and procedures.
7. The school follows generally accepted accounting principles as evidenced by independent financial audits with an unqualified audit opinion, a limited number of findings that are quickly corrected, and the absence of a going concern disclosure.

#### **Summative Evidence for Benchmark 5:**

The CSO reviewed BCCSG's 2016-17 audited financial statements to determine whether the independent auditor observed sufficient internal controls over financial reporting. The auditor did not identify any deficiencies in internal controls that could be considered material weaknesses.

## Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance

*The board of trustees provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school while maintaining policies, establishing performance goals, and implementing systems to ensure academic success, organizational viability, board effectiveness and faithfulness to the terms of its charter.*

### Finding: Approaches

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Board Oversight and Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The board recruits and selects board members with skills and expertise that meet the needs of the school.</li><li>b. The board engages in strategic and continuous improvement planning by setting priorities and goals that are aligned with the school’s mission and educational philosophy.</li><li>c. The board demonstrates active oversight of the charter school management, fiscal operations and progress toward meeting academic and other school goals.</li><li>d. The board regularly updates school policies.</li><li>e. The board utilizes a performance-based evaluation process for evaluating school leadership, itself and providers.</li><li>f. The board demonstrates full awareness of its legal obligations to the school and stakeholders.</li></ul>

### Summative Evidence for Benchmark 6:

The BCECS Board of Trustees have some dedicated board members but lack the systems to ensure effective governance, particularly with respect to its compliance with board by-laws and adherence to charter school regulations. While the board has corrected errors identified by the authorizer, it has not established procedures to maintain awareness of and to ensure adherence to its own commitments and obligations as a charter school governing body.

The BCECS Board of Trustees continues to struggle to recruit members to the board with a broad range of expertise who are representative of the school community, findings also reported in the 2015 renewal site visit report. On their spring 2017 self-evaluation survey, board members cited the inadequate numbers of board members and their lack of success recruiting new members as key weaknesses. During the focus group interview, the board acknowledged a need for legal expertise on the board and for a current parent representative. On the board survey, four members disagreed that the board has a plan for recruiting new members and one member didn’t know if there was a plan. The board explained they continue to recruit within their existing networks of personal and professional contacts as they have done in the past without a strategic design or plan to change the outcome of those strategies.

In contrast to the findings cited in the 2015 renewal site visit report, the board has not set explicit short and long-term academic goals beyond those defined by the Board of Regents in the *Charter School Performance Framework*. In the site visit interview, the board confirmed the statements in the renewal application and annual report that the board aligns its goals with those in the *Performance Framework*. In the interview, board members did cite a short-term goal of adding members to the board including someone with legal expertise and a parent representative. The board does not have its own strategic plan for managing its fiscal and governance responsibilities, instead adopting the standards in the Charter

School Performance Framework as stated in the renewal application. However, the board reported it has not established a process to regularly review each school's performance against each of the Performance Framework standards outside of the cycle of external reviews by SED. In the board self-evaluation survey, three members acknowledged that there is no succession plan in place for board members or school leaders.

To exercise its oversight of the two schools, the board receives monthly reports from school leaders including enrollment, attendance, and assessment data as available. During the focus group, board members expressed confidence that they have a clear understanding of each school's academic status in surpassing the district but not yet meeting state averages. Board members emphasized that they refrain from advising on specific programs or practices, delegating that responsibility to school leaders.

The board appears to have made substantial progress in resolving issues related to the school's financial management cited during the previous charter renewal process. They report doing this by adjusting staff and contracting with an accounting service that provides comprehensive budgets for each monthly board meeting. Benchmarks 4 and 5 provide extended discussion of the school's current financial status.

In the focus group interview, the board described plans to institute periodic reviews of board and school policies, something not currently happening. Recently, the board began the process to update its admission policy to incorporate preferences for SWDs and ELLs, two populations that have been consistently under-enrolled at the BCCS, and update its discipline policy. SED is working with the board on final approval of these policies.

When the BCECS board received approval to merge board operations for BCCSB and BCCSG, the board attorney prepared a revised set of by-laws to reflect the merged organization. The board has not consistently followed its by-laws in the number of members, remote participation, executive session documentation, and committee minutes. The board corrected the number of members after it was notified by SED that it was out of compliance but, according to meeting minutes posted and shared with the team, it was unclear which meeting was the Annual Meeting. In the board focus group, members reported believing they had held an Annual Meeting in either June or July, as required in Article V of its by-laws. While there were minutes for two meetings that were conducted in June, neither meeting indicated it was an Annual Meeting, and one of the two did not achieve quorum. If the July meeting had been considered the Annual Meeting, it would be out of compliance with Article V of the school's by-laws. In the focus group, board members indicated the governance committee would have responsibility for ensuring compliance with the by-laws and other policies, but the committees were designated only recently and have not established a plan to address that responsibility.

The team was unable to determine if the board was in compliance with the terms of office described in the by-laws because the school provided conflicting board rosters with different starting and ending dates of each board member's term of office

The board's revised by-laws include a commitment to comply with OML. While the board corrected errors in its compliance with the noticing requirements of OML when it was alerted by SED, it remains out of compliance with other components of the law. Full discussion of the board's noncompliance is presented under Benchmark 10.

**Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity**

*The school has established a well-functioning organizational structure, clearly delineated roles for staff, management, and board members. The school has systems and protocols that allow for the successful implementation, evaluation, and improvement of its academic program and operations.*

**Finding: Meets**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
1. <i>School Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school has an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to a clearly defined mission and set of goals, allowing for continual improvement in student learning.</li> <li>b. Roles and responsibilities for leaders, staff, management, and board members are clearly defined. Members of the school community adhere to defined roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>c. The school has clear and well-established communication systems and decision-making processes in place which ensure effective communication across the school.</li> <li>d. The school successfully recruits, hires, and retains key personnel, and makes decisions – when warranted – to remove ineffective staff members.</li> </ul>
2. <i>Professional Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school is fully staffed with high quality personnel to meet all educational and operational needs, including finance, human resources, and communication.</li> <li>b. The school has established structures for frequent collaboration among teachers.</li> <li>c. The school ensures that staff has requisite skills, expertise, and professional development necessary to meet students’ needs.</li> <li>d. The school has systems to monitor and maintain organizational and instructional quality—which includes a formal process for teacher evaluation geared toward improving instructional practice.</li> <li>e. The school has mechanisms to solicit teacher feedback and gauge teacher satisfaction.</li> </ul>
3. <i>Contractual Relationships</i> <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with the management company or comprehensive service provider.</li> <li>b. Changes in the school’s charter management or comprehensive service provider contract comply with required charter amendment procedures.</li> <li>c. The school monitors the efficacy of contracted service providers or partners.</li> </ul>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 7:**

While leadership roles and responsibilities overlap at BCCSG, in all interviews and surveys, staff, teachers, and parents express confidence in their understanding of the division of duties across the school. The school has systems, routines, and procedures in place that appear to be consistently implemented, resulting in smooth, efficient operations, including transportation, food service, academic support, classroom instruction, and afterschool programs. The school has procedures in place to monitor the academic program as well as its operations and this data is used to inform improvement decisions.



According to the organizational chart submitted with the school's renewal application, BCCSG is led by the director of school quality for the two Brighter Choice Charter Elementary Schools who also has served as the principal at BCCSG since 2016-2017. According to the board in the focus group interview, the decision to delay recruiting a principal was motivated by a wish to maintain stability in personnel following the school's separation from the Brighter Choice Foundation, as well as a concern about the availability of candidates suited to the position. In the school leader focus group, the principal described managing his dual role by distributing his time between oversight of operations and finances and supervising instructional and non-instructional staff in collaboration with the assistant principal and instructional coach. He manages human resource functions, monitors school culture and the work of the staff responsible for behavior and character initiatives, and acts to ensure positive family-school relationships. In the board focus group, board members shared plans of hiring a principal for BCCSG for the 2018-2019 school year. They reported wishing to wait to hire a new principal until the school's renewal was more secure.

According to school leaders, the assistant principal plays a major role in the day-to-day oversight of the instructional program for kindergarten through Grade 2 and the special education program, while the instructional coach parallels that role for Grades 3 through 5. In documents provided as part of the renewal application, the school provided written job descriptions for the roles of director of school quality and principal, but did not offer written details on the responsibilities of the assistant principal who is labeled the director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment on the organizational chart. Also missing from school documents are written descriptions of the responsibilities of other key staff members listed on the organizational chart including the instructional coach, dean of discipline, character education/behavior support, parent coordinator and school counselor. In focus groups, these individuals detailed their duties clearly and distinguished areas where they work collaboratively with other staff and in which areas they have independent responsibility.

BCCSG has struggled to recruit, hire, and retain key personnel, particularly teaching staff. High turnover across the charter term eased somewhat in the current year, when the school reported that 75% of its 2016-2017 staff returned for 2017-2018. According to the roster provided with its renewal application, seven teachers are new to the school this year. One parent expressed concern that the turnover of staff is impacting students when teachers with whom the children have built relationships leave. Sixteen of the 19 teachers (84%) responding to the NYSED survey administered in October 2017 agreed or strongly agreed that BCCSG is a long-term sustainable option for them as a place to work. The concerns noted by those not in agreement were the lower salary compared with nearby districts and the longer day and heavy workload.

According to teachers responding to the NYSED survey, the professional climate at BCCSG is supportive and encouraging. Teachers have common planning time with their grade level colleagues and they collaborate on planning lessons to ensure alignment of the curriculum across classrooms. Survey responses and school leader interviews confirm that school leaders visit classes frequently and provide written and one-on-one feedback and coaching to improve teachers' professional practice. While the instructional coach has been on leave this year, school leaders in the focus group explained that the principal and assistant principal have assumed more responsibility for providing mentoring and coaching for the teachers in Grades 3 to 5. In the NYSED survey, teachers reported they are formally evaluated three times a year, and the renewal application refers to the Brighter Choice Evaluative Tool as the protocol for formal reviews. In interviews and the NYSED CSO staff survey, school leaders and teachers confirmed that the process includes the observation and a one-on-one debrief, with follow-up visits by administrators to monitor progress.

Teachers responding to the NYSED survey indicated strong agreement that they feel supported to improve their professional practice. According to the calendar provided by the school, BCCSG allocates eight days for professional development before the start of the school year, plus an additional two half-day session for teachers new to the school. During the school year, four full professional development days are on the calendar. In the focus group interview, school leaders indicated that one of the primary strategies used for professional development is the one-on-one debrief sessions to review feedback from formal and informal observations. School leaders and behavior staff reported in their focus groups that they have occasionally met with a grade level team during their regular planning time to provide training or coaching to reinforce expected instructional practices or to introduce new initiatives.

The team learned from documents and focus group interviews that the school monitors student performance on an array of internal assessments as well as state tests and modifies the academic program in response to analysis of that data, as described in Benchmark 2. In the focus group, school leaders described recent changes to the curriculum, which include adjustment to the modules to focus on selected learning standards, and introduction of the *6 Traits* writing program. Because existing data was not providing reliable predictive information about student performance, school leaders explained during the focus group that they began administering the NWEA assessments in reading and math to measure growth toward grade level standards. The behavior team, consisting of the counselor, dean of students, and behavior support coordinator, described in the focus group that they track referrals to the Inspiration Room and input from teachers to assess the effectiveness of the school’s behavior management system. Information provided by parents through formal surveys, via email and text, and during in-person encounters with school leaders and staff, informs the school’s decisions about school operations, including transportation, meal services, school climate, culture, and safety.

**Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements**

*The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.*

**Finding: Meets**

*\*Note: The mission and key design elements are the same for BCCSB and BCCSG. The narrative below is the same for both reports.*

Element

Indicators

1. *Mission and Key Design Elements*

- a. School stakeholders share a common and consistent understanding of the school’s mission and key design elements outlined in the charter.
- b. The school has fully implemented the key design elements in the approved charter and in any subsequently approved revisions.

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 8:**

BCCSG appears to have systems and programs in place to focus the efforts of leaders, staff, and families on achieving the commitments in its mission. The school likewise appears to have implemented the key design elements included in the charter.

Academic systems and professional support for teachers move the school toward the “exemplary instruction” described in the mission. As described under Benchmark 7, the school conducts professional development before the school year begins and continues during the year, complemented by frequent

mentoring and coaching to ensure high quality instruction. Across the 18 classes visited by the team, students were engaged and actively participating in their lessons.

The scholar motivation system and social emotional learning curriculum adopted by the school contribute to the development of students' social, behavioral and organizational skills and character needed for future success, the second component of the school's mission. Data provided by the school shows a significant decrease in the number of students removed from class for disciplinary reasons compared to last year.

The BCCSG mission promises an education "beyond the basics" to include arts, science, and history. The ELA curriculum implemented by the school, the Engage NY ELA modules, integrates NYSLS science and history standards into the ELA lessons and student schedules include arts classes as part of their weekly routine. In their respective surveys, parents and teachers cited the school's success in achieving its aim to provide an education equal to the best public schools in the region as one reason for their high degree of satisfaction.

In addition to fulfilling the commitments in its mission, BCCSG has adopted practices and established procedures to implement the key design elements described in its charter. The key design elements include:

- An intense and serious focus on academic achievement
- An equally rigorous standard for scholar behavior, with an emphasis on core values
- Single-gender classroom instruction
- An extended school day and extended school year
- Mandatory school uniforms
- A high level of parental/guardian participation in the life of the school
- Frequent standardized testing, beginning in Kindergarten..

The BCCSG daily schedule demonstrates its intense and serious focus on academic achievement. A student day includes not only ELA and math classes, but also classes for guided reading, writing, extension, and RTI classes. The extension and RTI classes allow teachers to reteach topics or concepts as needed based on daily exit tickets and periodic assessments. Additional pull-out small group support for those struggling academically is provided by two interventionists, two special educators, and the ESL teacher.

At BCCSG, rigorous standards for scholar behavior are detailed in the "Scholar Motivation System" which emphasizes positive reinforcement of scholarly behavior and procedures for redemption and remediation to return the student to the classroom community promptly.

Three of the key design elements – single gender classes, extended day and year, and mandatory school uniforms – have been part of the school since its inception. BCCSG enrolls only girls, and is in session from 8:00 am until 3:30 pm, longer than the ACSD elementary day. School uniforms are evident, and students can earn tickets for meeting expectations and can enter them for a chance to win "dress down days."

According to reports from the school climate focus group, parent participation in the life of the school has been high, as detailed under Benchmark 3. While the parent teacher organization is inactive this year, school leaders described plans to launch a new parent engagement initiative that includes workshops and health and wellness activities.

Documents provided by BCCSG and procedures described in focus groups with school leaders list the array of standardized assessments administered by the school to diagnose areas of academic strength or weakness, to monitor progress, and to measure growth toward proficiency on the curriculum standards.

**Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention**

*The school is meeting or making annual progress toward meeting the enrollment plan outlined in its charter and its enrollment and retention targets for students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible applicants for the free and reduced priced lunch program; or has demonstrated that it has made extensive good faith efforts to attract, recruit, and retain such students.*

**Finding: Approaches**

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Targets are met</i>	a. The school maintains sufficient enrollment demand for the school to meet or come close to meeting the enrollment plan outlined in the charter.
2. <i>Targets are not met</i>	<p>a. The school is making regular and significant annual progress toward meeting the targets.</p> <p>b. The school has implemented extensive recruitment strategies and program services to attract and retain students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. Strategies include, but are not limited to: outreach to parents and families in the surrounding communities, widely publicizing the lottery for such school, efforts to academically support these students, and enrollment policy revisions, such as employing a weighted lottery or enrollment preference, to increase the proportion of enrolled students from the three priority populations.</p> <p>c. The school has implemented a systematic process for evaluating recruitment and outreach strategies and program services for each of the three categories of students, and makes strategic improvements as needed.</p>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 9:**

As shown in Table 8, while BCCSG enrolls a higher percentage of ED students than the district, it consistently enrolls fewer SWDs and ELLs than ACSD. As a result, the school is not meeting its enrollment targets for two of the special student populations. According to board interviews and documents submitted with the renewal application, the school’s recruiting strategies are similar to those used in the past with few revisions and do not represent “extensive good faith efforts” as defined in this benchmark. The school has not established a systematic strategy for evaluating its recruitment or retention efforts resulting in enrollment of SWDs and ELLs that continues to be well below the district.

BCCSG appears to have enrolled a high percentage of ED students over the sixteen years of its operation including the current charter term. Data reporting errors make the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years difficult to report on reliably. Strategies to recruit ED students listed on the school’s website and in documents submitted with the renewal application include providing free uniforms, meals, and transportation.

ELL student enrollment has been below the district of location over the current charter term. According to school reported data, BCCSG enrolled more ELLs for 2017-2018 than previously, particularly in kindergarten, however those numbers had not been finalized as of the site visit. Enrollment efforts have not varied much since the mid-term site visit in the previous year. The school cited similar strategies with the exception of the addition of another ENL teacher, which the school believes will improve retention. The school also began the process of adding an ELL preference to the lottery, but that has not yet been finalized with SED, and the school had no need to employ a lottery in the 2016-2017 school year. During the focus group, board members speculated that word of mouth was the primary reason more families chose to apply but they do not have a process for collecting data to identify the reasons for the increase in applications.

The enrollment and retention of SWDs at BCCSG falls far below district averages, resulting in a student population that varies widely from the district. In focus group interviews, school leaders and staff stated that SWDs are difficult to recruit and retain because the school does not provide the specialized settings required in some IEPs and, when informed of the school's program, parents elect to enroll their child where those supports are offered. The school plans to initiate an enrollment preference for SWDs but, as noted above, BCCSG did not hold a lottery for 2017-2018, so the inclusion of a lottery and its effect on recruitment of this population in the future is unclear.

Without a systematic process to collect data on which recruitment strategies have resulted in applications from target populations, the school continues to use similar strategies that it has used in the past. The school continues its practice of adding a note on its website that it serves SWDs and ELLs and participates in the free and reduced-price lunch program. School materials are translated into languages other than English to inform newcomers of the school's programs. In its renewal document, "Efforts Toward Recruitment and Retention," the school cites free uniforms and transportation as offerings that encourage economically disadvantaged families to enroll. Efforts to recruit ELL and SWD students are not as comprehensive.

In the focus group interview, board members and school leaders mentioned other strategies which are under consideration for future action. The board and school leaders expressed an intention to strengthen the relationship with a refugee agency in the city and are considering the feasibility of initiating a developmental kindergarten in 2018-2019. In the focus group interview, board members expressed the hope that a new partnership with a family mental health clinic to be launched this year will have a positive impact on recruitment and retention of SWDs and ELLs. At the time of the site visit, these initiatives were not in place and their impact on the recruitment and retention of ELLs and SWDs is uncertain and will not be known until 2018-2019.

Table 8: Student Demographics – BCCSG Compared to ACSD

	2015-2016			2016-2017			2017-2018 <sup>3</sup>
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance	BCCSG
SWDs	4%	12%	-8	3%	13%	-10	1%
ELLs	3%	10%	-7	2%	12%	-10	6%
EDs	76%	64%	+12	87%	57%	+30	83%

As shown in Table 9, in the 2016-2017 school year, 70% of students were retained from the 2015-2016 school year in BCCSG compared with 61% in the district of location. The school’s rate of retention for SWDs is below the district by 11%. It should be noted, however, that the small number of SWD and ELL students at BCCSG may skew the statistical comparisons to the district.

Table 9: Student Persistence - % of Students Who Enrolled in 2015-2016 and Remained Enrolled in 2016-2017

	2015-2016		
	BCCSG	ACSD	Variance
All Students	70%	61%	+9
SWDs	36%	47%	-11
ELLs	75%	55%	+20
EDs	70%	60%	+10

<sup>3</sup> Numbers listed are self-reported by the school in the Renewal Site Visit Workbook that accompanied the site visit.

**Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance**

*The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.*

**Finding: Falls Far Below**

<i>Element</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
1. <i>Legal Compliance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws and the provisions of its charter including, but not limited to: those related to student admissions and enrollment; FOIL and Open Meetings Law; protecting the rights of students and employees; financial management and oversight; governance and reporting; and health and safety requirements.</li> <li>b. The school has undertaken appropriate corrective action when needed, and has implemented necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements.</li> <li>c. The school has sought Board of Regents and/or Charter School Office approval for significant revisions.</li> </ul>

**Summative Evidence for Benchmark 10:**

The BCECS board has been responsive when they are alerted to instances of non-compliance with charter requirements or state and federal laws. However, they have not taken proactive steps to ensure their awareness of and compliance with the full range of their legal and regulatory obligations. The BCECS board remains out of compliance in several areas related to board by-laws, charter regulations, and OML. The school has displayed persistent inaccuracies in documenting and reporting school information and has not implemented adequate safeguards to ensure compliance with all legal requirements.

In addition to the instances of noncompliance with board by-laws discussed in Benchmark 6, BCECS has not followed charter regulations around procedures for revisions to the charter, timely submission of accurate data, and implementation of the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA). In their respective focus groups, school leaders and board members described their decision to amend their admissions policy to add a preference to applications from SWDs and ELLs as advised by the CSO. While the school submitted a draft version of the revised policy to SED for approval, it has not yet submitted a finalized document that reflects additional corrections noted by SED at the time of the visit. Board minutes for July 2017 record a vote to approve the admissions policy but as of the time of the site visit, the school has not taken the required steps to finalize the changes so they can be implemented for the upcoming enrollment cycle.

BCCSG has also changed the goals outlined in the original charter starting with the 2015-2016 school year. The 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 Annual Reports reflect a different academic goal than the ones outlined with the school’s last charter renewal in 2015. Any changes to goals outlined in the school’s charter are material revision requests which require NYSED approval. These did not go through the revision process.

The school submitted incomplete or inaccurate information as part of the renewal process, some of which were corrected. Errors were noted on the board roster and mid-term site visit workbook. For example, the board roster was incomplete, failing to list the number and dates of terms for each member; and there were large variances in board member terms with submitted and re-submitted documentation. The Renewal Site Visit Workbook contained mistakes in enrollment numbers that the school identified and

revised. Differences in the data provided on the school's Annual Report and those submitted for the renewal application were noted by the team. In the focus group interview, the board confirmed that there is not a system in place to ensure the accuracy and alignment of information across all submissions.

The school has also had errors in the submission of data to NYSED. In the school's renewal application, it notes that there were errors in reporting the number of ED students in both the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years to SIRS.

Since 2012, schools in New York State have been obligated to incorporate provisions of DASA into their codes of conduct and disciplinary policies. The discipline policy submitted with the BCCSG renewal application omits reference to DASA and does not include the required provisions to protect the safety of all classes of students. The BCCSG Discipline Policy submitted with the renewal application is an edited version showing changes made by the school's attorney. According to minutes from September 2017, the board approved the revised discipline policy but there is no record of the document receiving SED approval.

The BCECS Board corrected errors identified by SED staff during a previous site visit regarding postings of public meetings. However, the board remains out of compliance with additional obligations of OML regarding quorum, remote participation, documentation and posting of committee meetings, and contents of board minutes. The BCECS Board incorporated the key requirements of OML into their revised by-laws, and committed to holding themselves accountable for meeting OML regulations. The by-laws included in the renewal application have not yet been approved by SED.

Based on a review of board minutes, BCECS submitted in preparation for the renewal site visit is out of compliance with these specific provisions of OML:

- A quorum includes half the members of the board: In four meetings over the previous year, fewer than four members of the BCCS Board were present. While no substantive motions were made or voted on, the meetings were recorded as official despite the absence of a quorum.
- Votes on motions are valid when a quorum of members is physically present: The board regularly records members participating by phone. Minutes do not indicate the number of votes for or against motions made at those meetings and it is unclear if the votes of remote participants are counted when they should not be included.
- Committee meetings open to the public: When reviewed prior to the site visit, the BCCSG website stated that committee meetings were "closed to the public." This was corrected when alerted by the renewal site visit team and the BCCS website no longer indicates that committee meetings are closed.
- Minutes shall be taken at all open meetings: While minutes of board meetings are posted on the website and were provided to the team for review, no minutes of committee meetings are recorded or posted, although board minutes mention committee meeting discussions.
- Minutes shall consist of a record of motions, proposals and resolution, as well as the vote thereon: BCECS Board minutes provide scant information about the motion to be voted and do not document votes for or against the motion.
- Motions to enter executive session that specify the general areas or subjects to be considered, and minutes of any action taken by formal votes in executive sessions: At several times across the charter term, the board has entered executive session without documenting the purpose or topic to be considered and without listing the vote on actions taken.



As noted in Benchmark 6, the board does not have a member with specific expertise in the legal requirements of school boards and has sought to acquire that expertise by contracting with consultants but has not participated in training. During the focus group interview, the board acknowledged that they previously relied on the Brighter Choice Foundation to monitor compliance, and when that relationship was dissolved in 2014, they experienced a gap in procedures for ensuring adherence to legal requirements. The board delegates responsibility for accurate and timely reporting of school information in compliance with SED requirements to the director of school quality and do not have procedures in place to verify the submissions. As noted previously, the school corrected documents when inconsistencies and inaccuracies were pointed out but has not established affirmative internal procedures to ensure accurate reporting.