



New York State Education Department

Renewal Site Visit Report **2016-2017**

Global Community Charter School

Visit Date: 10/19 – 10/20/2016
Date of Report: 12/30/2016

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SCHOOL DESCRIPTION¹

Charter School Summary²

Name of Charter School	Global Community Charter School
Board Chair	Mary Jilek
School Leader	Phyllis Siwiec, Head of School Bill Holmes, Chief Operating Officer
District of location	CSD 5
Opening Date	9/04/2012
Charter Terms	Initial charter term: July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2017
Management Company	N/A
Educational Partners	International Baccalaureate (IB)
Facilities	2/2015 – Present: Private facility at 2350 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10037 8/2012 – 1/2015: Private facility at 421 West 145 th Street, New York, NY 10031
Mission Statement	Global Community Charter School serves the Upper West Side and West Harlem communities by providing students in grades K through 5 with an education that is rigorous, inquiry-based, and that teaches students and their families to work successfully together across differences in language, culture, economic background, age, and nationality. Our school prepares students for admission to a competitive high school.
Key Design Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple forms of evidence • Two teachers in each classroom • Visual and performing arts integration • Integrated Professional Development
Requested Revisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove mention of First Steps and Total Physical Response from charter. • New mission statement to reflect the location change of the school: “Global Community Charter School (GCCS) serves the communities of Harlem by providing students in grades K-5 with an education that is rigorous, inquiry-based, and that teaches students and their families to work successfully together across differences in language, culture, economic background, age, and nationality. Our school prepares students for admission to a challenging secondary education and to exhibit the courage and conviction to make a difference.”

¹ The information in this section was provided by the Charter School Office.

² The information in this section was provided by the NYS Education Department Charter School Office.

School Characteristics

Enrollment

School Year	Grades Served	Maximum Enrollment	Actual Enrollment
2016 – 2017	K – 5	465	444 ³
2015 – 2016	K – 4	385	367
2014 – 2015	K – 3	300	284
2013 – 2014	K – 2	225	222

METHODOLOGY

A full day renewal site visit was conducted at Global Community Charter School (GCCS) from October 19-20, 2016. The Charter School Office (CSO) team conducted interviews with the board of trustees, school leadership team, and parents. In cooperation with school leadership, the team also administered anonymous online surveys to teachers.

The team conducted 15 classroom observations in kindergarten through fifth grade. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length and conducted jointly with Yverose Ezrin, Director of Teaching and Learning (K – 2); Jillian Cantor, Director of Teaching and Learning (3 – 5); and Phyllis Siwiec, Head of School.

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

- **Renewal Application**
- **Renewal Site Visit Workbook**
- **Teacher roster**
- **Current organization chart**
- **A master school schedule**
- **Curriculum materials**
- **Board materials**
- **Blank teacher and administrator evaluation forms**
- **Student/Family handbook**
- **Staff handbook and personnel policies**
- **Professional development plans and schedules**
- **Enrollment data**
- **Academic data**
- **Annual Reports**
- **NYSED and NYCDOE administered surveys**

³ Self-reported by GCCS in Renewal Site Visit Workbook

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The Performance Framework, which is part of the oversight plan included in the Charter Agreement for each school that was chartered or renewed in 2012 or beyond, outlines 10 Performance Benchmarks in three key areas of charter school performance:

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

Observational findings from the site visit will be presented in alignment with the [Performance Framework](#) Benchmarks and Indicators according to the rating scale below. Each benchmark will be rated; however, the report narrative will highlight those indicators not fully met by the school.

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

For the site visit conducted from October 19 – 20, 2016 at GCCS, see the following Performance Benchmark Scores and discussion.

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

Performance Benchmark		Level
Educational Success	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).	Falls Far Below
	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 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) 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.	Approaches
	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.	Approaches
Organizational Soundness	Benchmark 4: Financial Condition: The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.	Meets
	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.	Approaches
	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.	Falls Far Below
	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.	Falls Far Below
Faithfulness to Charter & Law	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.	Meets
	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.	Approaches
	Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance: The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.	Falls Far Below

Performance Benchmark	Level
Summary of Findings	

Over the course of the GCCS initial charter term, the school has performed below the benchmark expectations outlined in the Charter School Performance Framework in the areas of student performance, board governance, fiscal management, and legal compliance. In the past year, GCCS has corrected many governance and fiscal management concerns, but student ELA proficiency still remains far below benchmark targets and remains lower than district and state averages. GCCS’s 2016 math proficiency rates did outperform CSD 5 by four percentage points but still remain far below state averages.

In the Charter Renewal Application and in the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) provided by the school in 2016 at the request of NYSED, school leadership outlined strategies to provide more targeted instruction with the expectation that these would lead to stronger student performance outcomes. During the renewal site visit, many of these strategies were not yet in place, including the establishment of baseline individual student competency data through *iReady*, the creation of a database to document data from multiple academic measures and the full implementation of the PBIS program. In addition, classroom observations showed little evidence of rigorous, targeted New York State Learning Standard (NYSLS)-aligned instruction.

The school must improve governance and management mechanisms in many areas in order to remain in compliance with applicable laws and regulations and charter agreement expectations, and to monitor student academic progress on an ongoing basis. As of the date of the site visit, it was not evident that the board was actively reviewing academic data or using it to evaluate the school leader. Reliance for baseline data at this point in the school year was on internal assessments that school leadership stated are not predictive of state assessment performance outcomes. The trustees do not currently have procedures in place to collect and evaluate objective quantitative interim academic data as well as annual outcomes, or to ensure the school is working toward its charter goals and meeting Board of Regents expectations.

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: Falls Far Below

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 1:

Indicator 1a. Accountability: GCCS was designated a Focus Charter School in 2015-2016. This designation is based on the low performance of the Hispanic student population on both ELA and math assessments.

Indicator 1b. Similar Schools Comparative Proficiency Analysis: Using the methodology described in the Performance Framework, GCCS conducted a similar schools analysis using 27 schools with comparable grade levels and student populations (although the school questions the validity of the comparison group, noting that the GCCS economically disadvantaged population is higher than the 78% reported). In the analysis, GCCS concluded that the school's performance hovered around or below the mean in both ELA and mathematics in 2015 and 2016.

Indicator 2a. Aggregate and Subgroup Trend Toward Proficiency: In the Renewal Application, the school reports that students have made gains in ELA but not in math. GCCS states, "In ELA, 31% of 62 tested students improved or maintained their proficiency between 2015 and 2016. In math, 2% of these students improved or maintained their proficiency." The school likewise reported for its subgroups that "...performance was mixed, with 13% of economically disadvantaged (ED) students and students with disabilities (SWD), and 11% of English language learners (ELL) increasing or maintaining proficiency in ELA. Two percent of ED students maintained or increased math proficiency, while no SWD or ELL students increased or maintained math proficiency."

Indicator 2b. Aggregate and Subgroup Proficiency (See Appendix A for further detail): GCCS's aggregate academic proficiency in both ELA and math falls far below the state average. ELA scores dropped from 21% below the state average in the 2014-2015 school year to 28% below the state average in the 2015-2016 school year. Math scores, while increasing by 10%, still fell 18% below the state average in the 2015-2016 academic year.

Compared to CSD 5 for both the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years, GCCS has performed below the CSD. In ELA, the school's scores decreased from -6% to -7% lower than the CSD. In math, the school made moderate gains, rising from -10% below the CSD to +4% in math.

Subgroup academic proficiency compared to CSD 5 showed mixed results. The ED subgroup increased in both ELA and math compared to the CSD, meeting either exactly or slightly above the target. Compared to the state, however, both ELA and math performed below the target with ELA declining to -13% below the state. The SWD subgroup fell significantly in ELA when compared to CSD 5, from +5% in 2014-2015 to -5% in 2015-2016. Math stayed relatively unchanged compared to the CSD 5, just meeting the district proficiency level. Compared to the state, however, both ELA and math scores dropped to below the targets, with ELA falling from meeting the target to -4% and math falling 13% from +5% to -8%. The ELL population scores fell compared to both CSD 5 and the state, although they are still meeting or slightly

above the target. In math, SWDs outperformed CSD 5 by +11% and outperformed the state by +5%. Both were increases of at least 10%.

See Appendix A for additional information.

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 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) 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: Approaches

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Curriculum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school has a documented curriculum that is aligned to the NYSLS. 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. c. The curriculum is aligned horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and vertically between grades. d. The curriculum is differentiated to provide opportunities for all students to master grade-level skills and concepts.
2. <i>Instruction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school staff has a common understanding of high-quality instruction, and observed instructional practices align to this understanding. b. Instructional delivery fosters engagement with all students.
3. <i>Assessment and Program Evaluation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school uses a balanced system of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments. b. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve student outcomes. c. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program, and modifies the program accordingly.
4. <i>Supports for Diverse Learners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 2:

While GCCS is working towards creating an effective teaching and learning environment for its students, several areas of concern exist with regard to how the curriculum and instruction are implemented in the classroom. Also, the implementation of scheduled assessment changes that could provide meaningful information to drive instructional plans for individual students has not been timely.

Curriculum

The school adheres to the *International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP)*. A PYP coordinator supports teachers in their implementation of this curricular approach and supports GCCS in its application for certification as an IB “World School.” PYP provides six transdisciplinary themes, which school leadership stated ensures strong horizontal and vertical alignment. While individual NYSLs have been matched to each transdisciplinary theme, the CSO team did not see evidence of these standards being taught or assessed within the classrooms. While each classroom had a planning board posted, for example, these displays contained a weekly, thematic overview rather than an actionable lesson plan. Only one classroom of the 15 observed had a posted objective during the lesson. The only assessment data observed on site were teacher-created worksheets and, in some instances, anecdotal observations. When the CSO team asked how student learning was being evaluated, the instructional leaders reported exit slips. However, in classroom observations, the CSO team did not observe exit slips in use, and when requested in a Grade 2 class, they could not be provided. The CSO team did observe interdisciplinary final projects posted in the hallways, but this did not provide evidence of NYSLs-alignment.

There were some observed instances of differentiated work for groups of students. In a fourth grade math class, for example, students were working on different multiplication problems. In a first grade classroom, students were reading different books during guided reading.

Teachers submit a weekly overview of their instruction, but they are not expected to create or submit formal lesson plans. In some instances during CSO observations, the instructional leaders could provide a general overview of expected classroom instruction but did not have a lesson or unit framework to draw from. When asked how teachers receive feedback on their instruction, leaders reported that feedback was given in the moment, via post-it, or they would “steal away 20 minutes,” if necessary.

Instruction

The CSO team observed 15 classrooms during the visit. In the majority of the observations, classrooms appeared organized and safe. Students demonstrated an awareness of expectations. All classrooms had more than one teacher, with many instances of three adults present.

The school’s Renewal Application and the directors of teaching and learning stated that small group instruction was an “integral feature of ELA instruction at GCCS.” Partial student engagement was observed in 11 of the 15 observations. In most instances, students were engaged if an adult was present within their group, but engagement waned once the adult left to support another group.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

GCCS goal is to use a set of assessments to provide baseline information and drive a differentiated instructional program for students. However, the actual implementation has been delayed, analysis is not yet available, and the application of the information is incomplete. The head of school reported that Pearson’s *GRADE* and *GMADE* tests had been administered at the beginning of the year to establish a baseline for individual student competency, but emphasized that the results were not considered predictive of state assessment results. Curriculum Associates’ *iReady* is planned to be phased in as a new internal assessment, but the school could not administer this assessment until after the November 7

training. The head of school reported that the new assessment would be rolled out following the training, but did not provide a clear and actionable plan. She stated that the data would be analyzed on a monthly basis and “confirm what we have already seen.” During the CSO focus group with the board, the trustee who leads the Education and Accountability Committee, which is charged with monitoring academic outcomes, stated that there had been two meetings during the academic year, but the committee had not reviewed any baseline assessment data.

The board and head of school reported that the data and testing assistant analyzed the 2016 state test results. The head of school reported that, based on this analysis, GCCS students did better in response to non-fiction passages as this genre better aligns with the research skills students’ encounter through PYP. No plan was provided to improve students’ performance within fiction passages.

Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems were administered at the start of the year. In the CSO focus group with the school leadership team, the head of school stated that this assessment consistently showed that half of students were reading behind grade level. She reported that kindergarten was “all over the place,” and that first grade was also scattered as a result of an influx of new students and attributed behavioral issues for the “flat” results in second grade. Once a month, teachers and behavioral specialists talk through the data and check on progress. The head of school reported that informal reading inventories will be rolled out as a more predictive measure. They had not begun at the time of our visit.

Supports for Diverse Learners

The school supports diverse learners through its staffing model – almost three-quarters of all classrooms are designated as Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) and the school contracts with an agency for two full-time speech therapists, one part-time occupational therapist, and a physical therapist; all of which provide mandated services. The school employs two reading teachers, a special education coordinator, and an ELL coordinator. Both coordinator positions were added this year and report to the supervisor of student support services.

The reading teachers work with approximately 50 students, each in all grades except kindergarten. Their caseloads are determined by running records’ data and they utilize *Fountas & Pinnell’s Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) System*. The instructional leaders reported that the data indicated that oftentimes once students stopped receiving LLI, their reading regressed.

The instructional leaders scheduled *Wilson Reading System* training for the week following our visit. When asked how and when Wilson instruction would happen, the instructional leadership and reading teachers could not provide an implementation plan.

The school does not offer self-contained special education classes. When asked how the school supports enrolled students mandated for this service, both the supervisor of student support services and head of school emphasized that it is not a service the school provides and communicates this to families during registration.

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: Approaches

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

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 3:

While GCCS has some systems in place to support students' socio-emotional health and safety, there are some that the school is still developing and/or not yet put into place.

Behavior Management and Safety

The school employs a robust behavioral management team. There are six behavioral specialists (one per grade) and a crisis intervention specialist. Student behavior was well-managed during our observations; there was only one instance observed of a student's behavior negatively impacting the learning environment. Each classroom participates in weekly lessons through the Ackerman Institute's Competent Kids Caring Communities (CKCC), which school leaders credit for creating a respectful school community.

The Renewal Application and information provided in the school leadership and the special populations focus groups report the school’s intent to implement an expansion of the PBIS program for the current school year. During the special populations focus group, it was reported that the PBIS team with programming was only in the planning stages with no formal meetings having taken place and no timeline for a roll out provided.

Family Engagement and Communication

The school employs a family worker, who was praised for his responsiveness during our parent focus group. The school has a Parent Advisory Team (PAT), which identifies one parent representative from each classroom, and also organizes a Parents as Partners Association (PAPA), whose goal is to provide a platform for concerns and information. The first meeting of the PAPA for the 2016-2017 school year was scheduled for October 27, 2016.

During the renewal visit, the CSO team met with a small group of parents. Based on a review of October parent newsletter and website communication, this focus group was not publicized to the greater GCCS community; PAT parents were invited by email to attend the focus group. These parents praised the “family” feel of the GCCS community. The parents reported that the school was outperforming the CSD, which demonstrates the need for the school to share fully accurate, school-level academic data, including its plan to remediate deficiencies, with the school community.

Social-Emotional Supports

When asked what data the school uses to gauge social-emotional needs, the head of school reported it was difficult to figure out where students were. The Renewal Application cites that GCCS is starting a system for tracking socio-emotional supports starting with the current year. It is designed to use a cloud-based system and the Renewal Application states it will be aligned with the Learner Profile (LP). With PBIS not yet initiated in the school, in accordance with the expectations outlined in the Renewal Application, and the school year freshly begun, the tracking has not yet begun.

Other socio-emotional supports at the school include a character education curriculum, a robust behavioral supports team, and the addition of a health class.

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

Finding: Meets

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 4:

GCCS generally *meets* the indicators for this benchmark as of the 2015-2016 academic year. This is a significant improvement as the school was rated “falls far below” for the 2012-2013, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015 academic years.

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 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. The 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. Global Community Charter School’s composite score for 2014-2015 is 0.80. The table below shows the school’s composite scores from 2012-2013 through 2014-2015.

**Global Community Charter School’s Composite Scores
2012-2013 to 2014-2015**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Composite Score</i>
2014-2015	0.80
2013-2014	-0.40
2012-2013	0.70

Source: NYSED Office of Audit Services

While the 2015-2016 composite score was not available at the time of this report, a review of financial statements indicates an improvement in the overall financial health of the school from the previous year.

Near Term Indicators

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

The *current ratio* is a financial ratio that measures whether 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 a cause for concern. For 2015-2016, Global Community Charter School had a current ratio of 1.5.

Unrestricted cash measures, in days, whether the charter school can meet operating expenses without receiving new income. Schools typically strive to maintain at least 90 days of cash on hand. For fiscal year 2015-2016, Global Community Charter School operated with 41 days of unrestricted cash.

Enrollment stability measures whether 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. Global Community Charter School’s enrollment stability for 2015-2016 was at 95 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 2015-2016, Global Community Charter School's debt to asset ratio was 0.5.

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 operating 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 2015-2016, Global Community Charter School's total margin was 9 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: Approaches

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 5:

The 2015-2016 audited financial statement had one audit finding (2016-01) due to the board of trustees having four members instead of five, as required by the school's by-laws. NYSED approved four new board members between July 27, 2016 and October 6, 2016 bringing the current total number of trustees to eight.

The independent auditor prepared a management letter in both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, which recommended areas for improvement. The three recommendations made in 2014-2015 (for auditor adjustments, cash receipt documentation, and the maintenance of finance committee minutes) were each addressed and corrected by the school. The 2015-2016 management letter had one recommendation, which was for lack of documentation for the performance of payroll reviews.

The school added staff to its internal accounting functions during the 2015-2016 year and these additions have enhanced internal controls.

Due to previous concerns over the GCCS's financial well-being, the CSO completed a fiscal site visit in coordination with the renewal site visit. Several areas were observed and some areas of concern were noted in special education revenue, purchasing, and inventory, which are detailed below:

Special Education Revenue

A sample of special education billing was tested for both 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. For a 2016-2017 invoice, special education reimbursement requests were tested for five students. Of these five requests, two were billed at the 60% level when the student's IEP appeared to be at the 20-40% level. As a result of this potential error, the school was advised on site at the fiscal site visit by the CSO team to review IEPs related to the 59 FTEs billed on 2016-2017 invoices. They were additionally advised that this review should take place prior to the next bi-monthly billing invoice that is submitted by the school.

In a follow-up email, the CSO requested an update on this observation and recommendation. GCCS reported that one student's IEP was an error that had since been corrected, and the other student was

in transition to another school. In addition, GCCS informed the CSO that an unspecified sample of IEPs, but not all IEPs, as advised, had been tested with no inconsistencies found on those.

Purchasing

Some purchases were made prior to a purchase order or a check request form being completed and approved. For example, an email from the school leader was attached to a purchase packet, which requested that a purchase be created for an item already purchased. Purchase approvals are important to ensure goods are needed, and to determine if funds are available in the budget.

The purchase order and check request forms do not always state the specific use for a proposed purchase. This will help ensure that the funds are being used for a budgeted purpose and are booked to the correct account code.

The school has a credit card policy that states the card can be used for expenditures up to \$5,000. During CSO testing of a sample of transactions, two purchases were found that were over \$5,000 and used the credit card; therefore policy was not followed. One purchase was for a \$5,400 staff appreciation luncheon. The other was for a \$13,956 purchase of computers.

The board should also consider whether the staff appreciation luncheon (and similar food, hospitality, and teacher gift expenses) is a best value purchase, and meets a bona fide need of the school, as required by the school's policy manual.

The school had support for each travel, food, and gift expense that was tested; however, as a suggestion for improvement, the documentation for these expenses could be enhanced. Support could be enhanced through additional documentation depending on the type of expense, such as proof of attendance at an event, an event brochure, or the number of attendees, for example. In addition, support should include whether the expense was within the budgeted amount especially for food and gift purchases that are not directly related to the school's mission.

Inventory

The inventory list could be expanded to include non-IT items especially those that pose a loss risk. The school appropriately conducted an inventory at the end of the 2015-2016 school year.

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: Falls Far Below

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Board Oversight and Governance</i>	a. The board recruits and selects board members with skills and expertise that meet the needs of the school. 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.

- c. The board demonstrates active oversight of the charter school management, fiscal operations and progress toward meeting academic and other school goals.
- d. The board regularly updates school policies.
- e. The board utilizes a performance-based evaluation process for evaluating school leadership, itself and providers.
- f. The board demonstrates full awareness of its legal obligations to the school and stakeholders.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 6:

Over the course of the charter term, and up to and including the site visit, the board has not performed in accordance with applicable laws, rules, and contractual expectations in numerous areas.

In the focus group, the board shared that their accomplishments over the charter term were securing a private facility, building organizational capacity by creating a dual Head-of-School/Chief Operating Officer leadership model, and initiating the hiring of a bookkeeper to support financial compliance.

A total of 13 board members left over the charter term. While the board currently has eight trustees, three of the six current trustees joined the board very recently, within three months of the visit. For the majority of the 2015-2016 school year, the board operated with fewer than five trustees, which is out of compliance with Education Law Section 226(1), which requires that all education corporations have no fewer than five members of the board of trustees.

There is little evidence that the board engages in strategic and active oversight of GCCS. The trustees have set a goal of more proactive oversight and created a 2016-2017 Strategic Board Goals document, which they shared as part of the document review. None of these goals are tied to the school’s academic outcomes. The CSO team’s review of a board dashboard showed that academic outcomes have not been reviewed as part of the board’s ongoing oversight.

As discussed in Benchmark 2, an Education and Accountability Committee has not reviewed baseline assessment data for this academic year, and the board does not currently have a means of collecting academic data independent of the instructional leader’s analysis. When asked if the school is on track academically, the trustees reported that it was “tough to say.”

The board reported that they review policies and procedures on an annual basis, but do not have a formal review protocol. The board conducts annual reviews of both school leaders. Neither of these evaluations includes a measure for academic performance.

<p>Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>
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Finding: Falls Far Below

Element

Indicators

1. *School Leadership*

- 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.
- 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.
- c. The school has clear and well-established communication systems and decision-making processes in place which ensure effective communication across the school.
- d. The school successfully recruits, hires, and retains key personnel, and makes decisions – when warranted – to remove ineffective staff members.

2. *Professional Climate*

- a. The school is fully staffed with high quality personnel to meet all educational and operational needs, including finance, human resources, and communication.
- b. The school has established structures for frequent collaboration among teachers.
- c. The school ensures that staff has requisite skills, expertise, and professional development necessary to meet students’ needs.
- 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.
- e. The school has mechanisms to solicit teacher feedback and gauge teacher satisfaction.

3. *Contractual Relationships*
 N/A

- a. The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with the management company or comprehensive service provider.
- b. Changes in the school’s charter management or comprehensive service provider contract comply with required charter amendment procedures.
- c. The school monitors the efficacy of contracted service providers or partners.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 7:

School Leadership

GCCS’s organizational structure has evolved throughout the charter term. During the 2015-2016 school year, the school created a dual administrative leadership structure with the head of school managing all the day-to-day instructional responsibilities and a chief operating officer overseeing building operations, finances, and business management. The leadership team also includes two directors of teaching and learning (one for k–2 and one for Grades 3-5), a supervisor of student support services, and an IB PYP coordinator.

The school leadership does not have clear and well-established communication and decision-making processes at this time. During the 2015-2016 school year, the instructional leadership team met weekly. When asked about this year’s meeting schedule, it was reported that there are two recurring meetings for instructional leadership – Mondays from 10–11 a.m. and every other Wednesday from 2–4 p.m., in addition to the monthly Education and Accountability Committee meeting. The Operations Team meets on the opposite Wednesdays. The head of school reported that it has been an exceptionally busy start of

school so they have not been able to meet regularly. She stressed that there are daily, informal meetings. Her team clarified to say that there have been three instructional leadership team meetings and one accountability meeting. The board reported two accountability team meetings.

The staff has experienced a great deal of turnover each year. Eight teachers left during the 2015-2016 year and at least nine of the eighteen classroom teachers were new to GCCS during the site visit. The head of school cited the school's IB approach, co-teaching, and longer hours as contributing factors to the attrition. She reported that candidates are screened more closely to ensure they align with these key design elements.

Professional Climate

School leaders reported that hiring was completed the week prior to the site visit, in mid-October. When asked if they were confident in the quality of the hires, the leaders stressed that the positions had been filled, but not by the ideal candidate in several cases.

The school provided an overview of their teacher evaluation system. During our co-observations, instructional leaders shared that feedback is provided to teachers during instruction or informally through classroom pop-ins or email. There was limited evidence provided of a formal process for teacher evaluation geared toward improving instructional practice. There was more of a focus on teachers' self-evaluating and given primarily informal feedback.

Classroom teachers have one hour of common planning each day and meet with their grade-level teams once per week. All-school professional development sessions are held each Friday afternoon. The Renewal Application referred to monthly data days, but these were neither on the school calendar nor where they referenced in any of the focus groups.

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

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Mission and Key Design Elements</i>	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:

GCCS appears to stay faithful to its mission and key design elements. In all classrooms, more than one teacher was present. Curriculum is aligned with the IB PYP framework and evidence of students' projects, portfolios, and multimedia presentations were displayed throughout the building. Students were observed engaged in arts instruction.

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>	<p>a. The school maintains sufficient enrollment demand for the school to meet or come close to meeting the enrollment plan outlined in the charter.</p>
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>

Student Demographics – GCCS Compared to District of Location

	2014-2015			2015-2016			2016-2017
	Percent of Enrollment		Variance ⁴	Percent of Enrollment		Variance	Percent of Enrollment
	School	CSD		School	CSD		School ⁵
Enrollment of Special Populations							
Economically Disadvantaged (ED)	78%	90%	-12	82%	82%	0	68%
English Language Learners (ELL)	15%	13%	+2	15%	10%	+5	19%
Students with Disabilities (SWD)	21%	23%	-2	22%	23%	-1	19%

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 9:

GCCS is in a unique position of moving facilities halfway through the 2014-2015, which moved the school from a temporary location in CSD 6 to its current and originally authorized for district of location, CSD 5.

⁴ Variance is defined as the percent of subgroup enrollment between the charter school and the district of location.

⁵ Reported by the school; 2015-2016 enrollment data has not been publicly released as of the date of this report.

The school was compared to both CSD 5 and CSD 6 during the 2014-2015 school year, although for this report, CSD 5 is being used throughout from the 2014-2015 academic year to present.

According to self-reported numbers by the school for the 2016-2017 academic year, the school is having uneven success in meeting enrollment targets in all of its subgroups. The ED population appears to show a marked decrease by approximately 14%. The ELL population has had a slight increase by approximately 4%, and the SWD population has had a slight drop by approximately 3%.

GCCS's ED population has been fluctuating since its inception, although it has spent most of its years below its targets. It appears to stay roughly in line, if not slightly below, with the SWD enrollment target, and it slightly exceeds its ELL target. The school did not provide a strategic plan for increasing the number of economically disadvantaged students, the population with the greatest deviation from the CSD.

It should also be noted that while the school detailed strategies to recruit students, the student retention rate reported by the school has been below 80 percent each year.

Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance

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

Finding: Falls Far Below

Element

Indicators

1. *Legal Compliance*

- 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.
- b. The school has undertaken appropriate corrective action when needed, and has implemented necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements.
- c. The school has sought Board of Regents and/or Charter School Office approval for significant revisions.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 10:

Over the charter term, GCCS has frequently been out of compliance in regards to reporting, policies, board management, and financial management.

Annual reports are not posted on the website, the discipline policy has not been updated to include the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), and the enrollment and admissions policy was approved and implemented by the board without CSO approval. In addition, the complaint policy (known in this case as the "Grievance Policy"), as detailed in the Family and Student Handbook, is incomplete. It does not provide contact information for either GCCS' board of trustees or the Board of Regents.

GCCS spent several months over the charter term not in compliance with Sections 2.13 and 2.19 of the school's Charter Agreement, which requires the school to operate pursuant to its by-laws, and in accordance with the Open Meetings Law. No board chair was elected between February 2015 and June 2015, which is out of compliance with the by-laws. According to meeting notes, a board member voted from a location that was not included on the public notice for the board meeting. This violates Open Meetings Law. A letter of concern was issued in August 2016, which cited that the board had functioned without a quorum, board members were improperly seated, and changes to term limits were made to the by-laws without CSO approval.

As cited in Benchmark 6, for the majority of the 2015-2016 school year, the board operated with fewer than five trustees, which is out of compliance with Education Law Section 226(1), which requires that all education corporations have no fewer than five members of the board of trustees. In order to conduct business on behalf of the school, the board of trustees must have five board members. At fewer than five members, the remaining members could only act to add additional members to the board, however, GCCS continued to conduct business at those board meetings. This was included in the letter of concern sent by the NYSED CSO.

In addition, when asked on-site how students with disabilities requiring settings (like a 12:1:1 classroom) not offered by the school were being counseled when they requested entry into the school, staff reported that parents were told the school did not offer that setting. When asked if the school worked with the CSE to attempt to accommodate the students, staff responded that they did not. Charter schools may not turn students away based on their disabilities.

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES

Note: Numbers rounded to nearest whole number.

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

All Students	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-15	10%	16%	-6	31%	-21	10%	20%	-10.4	38%	-28
2015-16	14%	21%	-7	38%	-24	21%	17%	+4	39%	-18

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

Economically Disadvantaged	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-15	11%	16%	-5	21%	-10	9%	20%	-11	27%	-18
2015-16	14%	14%	0	27%	-13	22%	15%	+7	28%	-6

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

Students with Disabilities	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-15	11%	6%	+5	6%	+5	11%	11%	0	11%	0
2015-16	0%	5%	-5	8%	-8	7%	6%	+1	11%	-4

Table 4: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup – English Language Learners: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

English Language Learners	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch–Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch–NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch–Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch–NYS)
2013-14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-15	8%	0%	+8	4%	+4	8%	10%	-2	13%	-5
2015-16	4%	1%	+3	4%	0	17%	6%	+11	12%	+5