



Office of Innovative School Models

Charter Schools

Renewal Report

School: Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls (BCCSG)			
Date of Site-Visit:	September 21 - 22, 2010	Members of Site-Visit Team:	Erica Cervine, Cheri Keith-Murray, Susan Megna, Susan Gibbons

1. CAN THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO OPERATE IN AN EDUCATIONALLY SOUND MANNER?

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL	
Mission	The school is faithful to the mission, vision, and educational philosophy defined in the charter application and subsequent approved amendment(s), if applicable.

"The mission of the Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls is to ensure that students have the same opportunities for future success as students attending the best public schools in the region. There are three significant components to achieving this mission: exemplary instruction that ensures competency and mastery in reading, writing, and mathematics; focus on the development of social, behavioral, and organizational skills necessary for future school success; an education beyond the basics that includes: Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Sciences, and History."

Evidence:

- The mission statement includes a focus on the development of social, behavioral, and organizational skills necessary for future school success. Renewal site visit team members observed evidence of these skills throughout the entire school. The school leader expressed that by focusing on social, behavioral, and organizational skills the school has seen "negative behaviors decrease and performance increase." The school has added additional time for ELA and Math instruction..
- Through classroom observations and interviews with school leaders, the Board of Trustees (BoT), teachers, and parents, it was clear to the site visit team that the school is living its mission.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM	
Academic Program	The school establishes an academic program, including pedagogical approach, curriculum, assessment, and other unique elements of the educational philosophy defined in the charter application or subsequent approved amendments.
Student Services	The school provides services for all students, including but not limited to those with special education, English Language Learner needs and those eligible for the federal free- and reduced-price lunch program, as defined in the charter application or approved amendments and as required by law.
Enrollment	The school's student recruitment and enrollment process is faithful to that intended in the charter and as defined by statute and regulation.

Evidence:

- The Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls (BCCSG) has adopted hundreds of detailed learning standards, including many from the highly successful Core Knowledge sequence. Renewal site visit team members observed evidence that the school is using commercial curricular materials, including Treasures for Reading and EnVision Math as well as research based instructional methods such as Writing Workshop and Response to Intervention to further support the learning standards and increase student academic achievement.
- The BCCSG offers parents and students in Albany a unique alternative to existing public schools, including the following features:
 - the provision of a single-sex learning environment;
 - a longer school day and year-round school year; and
 - a school uniform.
- The year-round school was highly supported by all focus groups interviewed. Students indicated they enjoyed the project based learning activities that were implemented during the extension period.
- Instruction in ELA and Math are a focus at the school. Additional learning times in both areas have been incorporated into the daily schedule.
- The school has four students with IEP's. Special education students reflect 1.6% of the student body, which is considerably lower than the district of location (23%).
- The school has a population of English language learners (ELL) (6.5%) and according to the administrative team, there is limited programming for ELL's. This is comparable to the district of location (5.5%).
- The school provides inclusion model teaching for all students with an IEP. The special education coordinator works closely with classroom teachers to provide exemplars of high quality teaching and appropriate program modifications to ensure student achievement.

- BCCSG administers all assessments required by New York State. Further, Grade K through 5 students take TerraNova assessments in English language arts and math.
- The school has implemented a data analysis program. Teachers create bi-weekly tests, which include test items that are similar to New York State assessment program items. Bi-weekly data analysis meetings are held as part of the professional development program.
- BCCSG has implemented the Emotional Intelligence model throughout the school. The administrative and teacher focus groups indicated they have seen an improvement in student behaviors since inception of the program. The renewal site visit team observed that teachers and staff maintain consistent classroom behavior standards throughout the building.
- BCCSG currently serves 244 students in Grades K through 4. In the prospective renewal application, the school seeks an enrollment increase of 20 students to bring the total enrollment to 270 students.
- The BoT and administrative team focus groups indicated that student recruitment strategies include advertising in local media and placing flyers in community establishments.
- The BoT, administrative team, and teacher focus groups indicated that the school bases employment contracts with the head of school and teachers on performance which includes student academic achievement and teacher effectiveness (using a form of merit pay). Individual teacher goals are set for professional development based upon evaluations.

STATE MANDATED ASSESSMENT	
NYS Testing Program	Students at the school demonstrate Proficiency, or progress toward meeting proficiency targets on state standards, as measured by the NYS Testing Program assessments in all subject areas and at all grade levels tested for accountability purposes.
Accountability Goals	The school meets, or shows progress toward meeting, NYS Testing Program goals.
AYP	The school makes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the aggregate and for all statistically significant sub-groups. The school is not identified for accountability purposes (not designated as in Needs Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring).

Evidence:

- The school's charter specific goals include academic and non-academic goals. The academic goals stated that at least 50% of continuously enrolled students would be proficient on each State English language arts (ELA) and math assessment in 2005-06. Additionally, the percent proficient would increase by an average of 5% per year from 2005-06 to 2009-10. The non-academic goals included student conduct and community support. The percent of the school's students that have shown proficiency on the 2009-2010 State Assessments is as follows: ELA: 46.5% ; and math: 67.5%. The school has not measured progress towards the non-academic goals; reporting on these goals is not due until the school's annual report is due.

- According to the prospective renewal application, the school has changed its external assessment goals to be more rigorous. Specifically, the school has increased academic proficiency rate goals by 15 percentage points.
- BCCSG outperformed the district of location in both ELA and math by a margin of 20 Performance Index (PI) points in ELA and 35 points in math during the 2009-10 school year. The school has increased 8 percentage points in ELA from 2007 through 2010 and 16 percentage points in math from 2007 through 2010.
- BCCSG has a combined Performance Index (PI) of 185 for ELA and Math according to the 2009-2010 test results. The combined PI has increased by 12 points since the 2007-2008 school year.
- The Performance Index information is shown below:

Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls – PI for ELA			
Student Group	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
All Students	162	167	170
Black	163	172	171
Economically Disadvantaged	161	165	167

Albany City School District – PI for ELA			
Student Group	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
All Students	140	157	150
Black	133	151	143
Economically Disadvantaged	134	153	144

Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls – PI for Math			
Student Group	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
All Students	184	200	200
Black	183	200	200
Economically Disadvantaged	183	200	200

Albany City School District – PI for Math			
Student Group	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
All Students	146	159	165
Black	139	153	157
Economically Disadvantaged	141	156	162

- BCCSG is currently a school in good standing in all areas and for all sub-groups.
- During the focus group conversation with the Board, they recognized that student academic achievement must increase. Focus interviews with the BoT and teachers indicated that a standard based data analysis system that can predict results was being adopted and implemented. Teachers have developed bi-weekly test items for local tests based on state assessment models.
- Academic goals have been made more rigorous in the prospective renewal application by increasing the percentage of students achieving proficiency to 75% for both ELA and Math.

OTHER ACHIEVEMENT, IMPROVEMENT, AND ASSESSMENT MEASURES	
Accountability Goals	The school meets, or shows progress toward meeting external assessment goals.
Internal Measures of Student Achievement	Students demonstrate progress on internal measurements linked with the school's promotion or exit standards.
Accountability Goals	The school meets, or shows progress toward meeting internal assessment goals.

Evidence:

Academic Measure

- *Goal #1: Students at Brighter Choice will meet and exceed state standards for mastery of skills and content knowledge in reading and mathematics.*

Objective A: By the end of school year 2009-2010, 70% of Brighter Choice's students who have been continuously enrolled at the school since kindergarten will attain a score of Level 3 or Level 4 on the New York State English language arts exam in each grade for which such tests are administered.

Objective B: By the end of school year 2009-2010, 70% of Brighter Choice's students who have been continuously enrolled at the school since kindergarten will attain a score of Level

3 or Level 4 on the mathematics exam in each grade for which such tests are administered. **Students in grades 3 and 4 did not meet Objective A of this goal in 2009-2010. They did meet Objective A in all prior years of the charter. Objective B was achieved by the school.** When the BoT was asked about not meeting Objective A, they responded “As a result of the new cut score for proficiency, fewer students met or exceeded the New York State English Proficiency standards in 2010 than in previous years. Without a change and using the 650 cut score as the benchmark for the past five years, the passing percentage would have been an 80% pass in Grade 3 and a 100% pass in Grade 4. We recognize the need to meet or exceed these new proficiency standards and have a plan in place to do so. We are increasing the rigor of our academic program by ensuring collaboration of staff members across grade levels using weekly scheduled planning times, continuing to hold effective monthly professional development, implementing a stronger Academic Intervention Support program, having a more refined Rtl process, which involves using curriculum-based measurements as an on-going progress monitoring tool, and using data from internal assessments. Instead of a six week interval assessment cycle, diagnostic testing happens on a bi-weekly basis. Teachers get results sooner and can form small groups for tutoring, remediation or enrichment.”

- In the prospective renewal application, the school has changed its external assessment goals to be more rigorous. The administration reports that this and other changes are “part of the renewal process.” The school has begun to implement a data system that analyzes data on a regular basis. Assessments occur every two weeks and feedback to teachers is instantaneous. Teachers create “New York State style items” for bi-weekly tests. Various groups of items are created to foster differentiated instruction. The items correspond to New York State performance indicators.
- Academic goals and progress toward meeting these goals are reported on at Board meetings. When asked how this information is used, Board members indicated that it allows them to “ask informed questions.” They look for causes, solutions and additional services that might be needed, and ask for patterns and trends that might appear.

CURRICULUM	
Skills and Knowledge Expectations	The school’s curriculum, as implemented in the classroom, consistently addresses the skills and concepts that all students must know and be able to do to meet NYS Learning Standards, and supports opportunities for all students to master these skills and concepts.
Diverse Learners	<p>The school’s curriculum articulates the skills and concepts that all students must know and be able to do, and supports opportunities for all students to master established skills and concepts.</p> <p>The school establishes and implements an accommodation plan that addresses the needs of diverse learners.</p>
Program Evaluation	The school has systems and structures in place to regularly and systematically review the quality and effectiveness of the academic program.

Implementation of the Curriculum	The school's curriculum is documented, and teachers plan and deliver lessons directed by the school's curriculum guidelines.
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Evidence:

- Internal and external assessment scores have indicated that students have been consistently meeting NYS Learning Standards. As noted earlier in this report, 46.5% of BCCSG students are proficient in ELA and 67.5% in Math according to the 2009-2010 data. In addition, the school has outperformed the Albany City School District, which has a proficiency rate of 39.8% in ELA and 54.2% in Math during the same time period. The school's records show consistent improvement over time in the level of proficiency prior to the 2009-2010 school year.
- Emotional Intelligence, Treasures, EnVision Math, the Writing Workshop, Response to Intervention, the staff's regular review and analysis of data, along with the adjustment of curriculum based upon the data results are all evidence that the school is providing opportunities for all students to master established skills and concepts.
- BCCSG provides instruction for 211 days each year. Students receive instruction that exceeds the NYS daily requirement of 5.5 hours a day.
- Learning expectations were applied inconsistently throughout the school. The renewal visit team observed varying qualities of rigor in direct instruction, modeling, lesson preparation and classroom management.
- The school has well developed programs to meet the needs of SWD's. The renewal site visit team observed an inclusion model with appropriate supports to SWD's. During the focus group interview, the administrative team indicated there is limited programming for ELL's. Evidence of the implementation of Response to Intervention was also seen by the site visit team.
- Evidence from a review of the quality and effectiveness of the academic program from the site visit includes:
 - NYS test scores continuing to be high and consistently outperforming the district of location.
 - Data analysis is occurring every two weeks. Students are provided specific instruction based upon the results of the analysis.
 - Opportunities to integrate curriculum across subject areas and grade levels is available.
 - Extended time-blocks of instruction are provided for ELA and Math.
 - A year-round school calendar providing for increased learning opportunities.
 - Reading and writing are reinforced across the curriculum.
 - The renewal site visit team observed relevant curriculum that is aligned to the NYS Standards.

TEACHING AND LEARNING	
Instruction	School-wide instructional practice is aligned with the school design and student learning objectives, is consistently and effectively delivered, and conveys clear expectations to students. Teachers are purposeful in their lessons and students are engaged in meaningful learning.
Effective Teaching	There is evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing, alignment of curriculum to State Standards, and student engagement.
Assessment and Instructional Decision-Making	Teachers and school leaders use qualitative and quantitative evidence to inform and guide instructional planning and practice.

Evidence:

- The curriculum is driven by teacher-developed lesson plans which are aligned to the NYS Learning Standards. Project based learning is the primary method of instruction during the school year extension.
- Curriculum maps, which specify the skills and concepts that all students must know and be able to do to meet NYS Learning Standards, were provided to the review team
- Lesson objectives were posted in each classroom and teachers referenced them periodically during instruction. Instructional pacing was inconsistent throughout the school.
- Evidence of high-quality instruction included modeling by teachers, small group instruction, and direct instruction. Teachers demonstrated a positive attitude toward students; sought to engage them on tasks; solicited feedback; and provided clear instructions. Positive reinforcement was used as a motivational technique.
- The school employs a seven-hour school day and provides year-round schooling, which yields thirty-one more instructional days than the district of location.
- Teachers have flexibility in use of various instructional tools.
- Response to Intervention is being implemented through small group tutoring. The AIS staff person instructs students, with “whatever it takes.” AIS groups are formed across classrooms and grades when appropriate. The renewal visit team observed students generally engaged in most classrooms, yet rigor of instruction and pacing during lessons and transitions did not appear to be consistent throughout the building.
- BCCSG makes use of purposeful and ongoing assessment that guides subsequent instruction. For example, teachers reported that a team approach is used to create small groups of students who did not achieve mastery on the most recent assessment.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP	
Effective Leadership	The school leader has the experience and skills needed to successfully implement the school's charter.
Leadership Development	School leaders receive appropriate and timely professional development. Mentoring or coaching programs are in place and effective.
Building Level Leadership Team	The school is utilizing its Building Leadership Team to implement school improvement.
Instructional leadership	School leaders provide teachers with feedback and guidance that leads to improved instructional practice and student achievement.

Evidence:

- The charter is currently being implemented with fidelity. The main components of the mission and focus were observed to be practiced and achieved. There is a focus on the development of social, behavioral, and organizational skills necessary for future school success; the school is meeting and exceeding state performance standards; and a longer school day and year-round school year are implemented.
- Teachers set their own five professional goals each year. They complete self-evaluations that include professional growth plans, in which they focus on their own needs. Informal observations occur twice a day, with follow up by the school leader. Formal observations occur two or three times a year. Teachers reported that the evaluations provide good feedback. The curriculum coordinator provides "great resources." At the end of the year, a merit based bonus is provided based on teacher performance, including student test results and adherence to the schools mission.
- All parents, staff members, and Board of Trustees' members who spoke to the Renewal Team were very satisfied with the head of school's leadership. Teachers and parents referenced the head of school's "open door" policy which makes her accessible to them. Teachers indicated "they feel constantly supported" when explaining their relationship with the head of school. They also reported school leaders to be visible and further take an active role in promoting the school's theme. The current head of school was previously a teacher at BCCSG. The leadership team, teachers, and BoT concur that this has been instrumental in the development of the positive working relationships.
- According to focus group responses, the school leadership team members spend a great deal of time in classrooms. Both formal and informal observations provide staff with constructive feedback.

SCHOOL CLIMATE	
Environment is Conducive to Learning	The classroom and school environment is orderly and supports the goal of student understanding and mastery of skills and is consistent with the school's mission. Supervision is sufficient, respectful, and consistent.
Collaboration	Administrators, teachers and staff communicate openly, positively and effectively. Professional learning communities exist and affect improvement efforts.

Evidence:

- Classrooms and common areas were neat, orderly and conducive to learning. The overall environment of the school promoted academia and personal/social growth. The sense of community was consistent throughout the building.
- The school uses Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a discipline system. There are “mood meters” in every classroom. Teachers use visuals to represent consequences for behavioral infractions. For example, in one classroom busses were used to represent the 17 students. The busses were placed on the "road" to represent students' behavior at that point in the day. Consequences include reprimanding, moving seats, calling a parent and being sent to the office.
- When asked about EI, teachers reported that they “love it”. They have professional development every year on the implementation of EI. Moods are plotted each day by the children on a publicly visible space. The system was reported to also affect teachers self-awareness. The school leadership team reported that students arrive at school with no “emotional vocabulary.” They also reported that the EI system promotes students learning of compassion for other students moods. The EI system was also reported to assist children in developing a sense of self.
- Teachers reported a “family feeling” about the school, and spoke of it as a community. They indicated that they work actively at building relationships with students, for whom they have high praise.
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention is a topic for professional development. The leadership team reported that it is helping teachers to identify triggers of behavior and simultaneously is validating teachers.
- Through classroom observations the renewal visit team found that teachers are very caring with students, encouraging them, giving positive feedback, complimenting them. They frequently worked one-on-one with students.
- Teachers reported that they have excellent relationships with the administration, they feel very comfortable with them, administrators are approachable, and they feel more supported than in prior experiences in public schools. Staff felt that it was a significant aspect of the school that the school leaders have been teachers themselves.
- Teachers “love” their great colleagues, and say they are friends, and like family.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	
Parent Involvement	Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of parents.
External/Community-Based Partners	Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of community partners.

Evidence:

- Parents are welcomed into the school and actively search for ways to become involved, such as managing clubs.
- Teachers say that parent involvement is better than ever – they have found many ways of communicating. Home visits were noted as being very effective.
- There is a parent representative on the Board who appointed by the principal. At the time of the renewal visit, the parent member had not been voted to the Board. The BoT indicated that they were "behind" on this. They also indicated that the parent members were currently being selected and would be appointed at the next BoT meeting.
- The Board members described an increase in parent involvement through specific activities, such as cultural dinners, fundraising, and PAL basketball (for dads).
- The school is making use of community resources to supplement its academic program. The school is currently partnered with Albany College of Pharmacy through its Help Yourself Partnership, and the Puerto Rican Caucus and Mentorship program.
- Parent surveys showed that parents feel very positively about the academic program at the school as well as the other aspects of behavior and the school community. In an annual survey, 100% of parents of BCCSG rated the school at the B level or higher (on a scale of A to F) in terms of the overall quality of the education received by children and the overall effectiveness of teachers.
- Parents reported that the teachers and administrators are available to them.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND EVALUATION	
Organizational Needs	The school has realistic plans for program improvement, possible future expansion, and adequate facilities based on evaluation and analysis of data, if applicable.
Academic Program Needs	The school evaluates the impact of its academic programs on student achievement and modifies its programs to ensure improvement.
Teacher Evaluations	Teacher evaluations linked to student performance have been put into place. The system and data used must be consistent with State APPR system.

Evidence:

- The school, in its prospective renewal application, is requesting an increase in enrollment of 20 students. This proposal is in response to strong parent and community support as well as a substantial wait list across all grade levels.
- The impact of the academic programs on student achievement is continually evaluated throughout the academic year. The data analysis program previously mentioned in this report as well as NYS assessment information is part of the evaluation. Programmatic modifications are made based upon these evaluations.
- Teacher evaluations are completed multiple times per year. Formal and informal observations are conducted. Informal observations occur twice per day and formal observations occur two to three times per year.
- Teachers indicated that school leaders are in classrooms daily.
- A merit bonus is provided to teachers based upon performance evaluations, adherence to the school’s mission, and student academic achievement.

2. CAN THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE THE ABILITY TO OPERATE IN A FISCALLY SOUND MANNER?

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	
Solvency and Stability	<p>The school develops budgets that are realistic and in support of student academic achievement.</p> <p>The school demonstrates a history of positive net assets, adequate cash flow to sustain operations and support the academic program, and consistently operates within budget.</p> <p>The school develops a budget that can be sustained by its enrollment.</p>
Fiscal oversight	<p>The Board of Trustees and school leadership implement effective structures and systems to enable responsible fiscal oversight of the school.</p> <p>The Board of Trustees has an external company complete a yearly audit.</p> <p>The Board of Trustees demonstrates long-term fiscal oversight through appropriate planning processes.</p>
Internal controls	<p>The school implements an effective system of internal controls over revenues, expenses, and fixed assets, and exercises good business practices.</p>

Evidence:

Solvency and stability: The school was issued an unqualified opinion by the independent auditors in each year the school had an independent financial audit performed. Audits are an annual requirement per the charter for each year the school operates. An unqualified opinion indicates the school had no material misstatements in its financial reporting. However, the school did have a net deficit in both years contributing to the overall deficit balance. This was due primarily to the mortgage debt through the issuance of bonds for the purchase and renovation of the school building. The budget for the years starting in 2009-2010 and forward (the renewal period begins 2010-2011) projected a net surplus due to an increase in enrollment and subsequent increase in revenue. The independent auditors did not issue a “going concern” opinion despite the continuing deficit for the years 2008 and 2009; this indicates a confidence that the school will be able to manage the deficit. The statement of cash flows in the audit indicated positive cash flows for the audit years.

A five year budget projection was submitted; however it was submitted for years 2009-2010 through 2013-2014. The renewal period is 2010-2011 through 2014-2015. There was also an inconsistency in the enrollment projections used to calculate the revenue and the enrollment projections as stated in the proposed Part I of the renewal. The projections in the budget were lower than the proposal which would place revenue estimates on the conservative side. The enrollment may have been based on the students’ average full time equivalent for the period but this was not indicated in the renewal packet budget.

A comparison of the per pupil expense for the budgeted period to the audit years actual expenses indicated that the per pupil expense has decreased due to maintaining expenses at the current level with minimal reasonable increases in such expenses as salaries and fringe benefits.

Fiscal Oversight: The Board of Trustees was cited in the management letter for the independent audit dated June 30, 2009 for not reviewing bank statements and cancelled checks for propriety. The auditors’ internal control report cited the Board for not regularly reviewing interim financial reports. The Board responded positively by adopting a policy to review financial statements at every Board meeting. The Board does have an independent audit performed every year by a certified auditor.

Internal Controls: In conjunction with the annual audit report, the independent CPAs conducting the audit issue a report on internal control. The report on internal control for the year ending 2009 stated that no deficiencies were found in the internal controls of the school during the course of their audit except for the Board of Trustees reviewing financial statements as stated above.

The school submitted a plan of internal controls in the submission of their Financial Policies in Attachment XVI.

The school does not have contracts in place for shared staff.

The school bills back for shared services with the Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys and the Brighter Choice Charter Middle School for Girls. They are reimbursed monthly for salary and benefits. No one is employed directly by the Foundation according to the Board. The administration reports that the chief fiscal person works with the Board and the Foundation.

3. CAN THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE ADEQUATE LEVELS OF PARENT AND STUDENT SATISFACTION?
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PARENT AND STUDENT SATISFACTION	
Family Satisfaction	Through the use of parent and student (where appropriate) surveys, the school demonstrates that families are satisfied with the school's program
Student Retention	The school can document the numbers and reasons for student attrition.

Evidence:

- The school is providing families and students with more choices in educational opportunities. BCCSG offers a longer school day, an extended school year, additional learning times for ELA and Math, numerous opportunities for parent involvement, the Emotional Intelligence approach to teaching and learning, and an emphasis on community and caring beyond the classroom.
- In an annual survey, 100% of parents of BCCSG rated the school at the B level or higher (on a scale of A to F) in terms of the overall quality of the education received by children and the overall effectiveness of teachers.
- The parents that were interviewed were enthusiastic about the school, citing the “family environment” and “motherly instinct” shown by staff toward the students. They supported the single-sex school, uniforms (new and better quality), and the discipline system. Parents had high praise for the way staff support families, how teachers go above and beyond in their commitment to students, the administration’s open door policy and the openness and accessibility of the staff. The teachers make home visits, which parents appreciate, and in which children are “ecstatic” to have received.
- Students were as enthusiastic as their parents regarding the atmosphere in the school – they talked about teachers as their family constantly. Some students stated “I have a lot of family”; “Teachers are like my mom and aunties”. They talked about doing “fun things” in math and ELA, and how the teachers respond to their need for help.
- Parents noted that their children are able to express themselves through dance, which contributes to increased self-confidence. The renewal team observed this in the dance classes.
- The only areas parents felt could be improved were the lunch menu and the lack of space in the kitchen (by a parent who works in the kitchen). They did have complaints about the bus service being unpredictably late and the lack of bus monitors. When using district busses, they felt that the district treats charter school students differently than its own. They reported that students are often not picked up or dropped off on time, sometimes by a half an hour or more.
- The Dean of Students is highly thought of. Discipline is consistent from home to school. Suspension is used only as a very last resort.
- The Parent Handbook was given to parents on the very first day of school.
- The Parent Handbook does not contain the complaint process.

- In the last year for which data is available, the school had an attrition rate of 8%; most students either left due to parental choice or moved out of the geographic area.
- The school currently has a waitlist.

4. CAN THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS A VIABLE ORGANIZATION?

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	
Leadership/ Governance	The Board of Trustees implements the governance and leadership structure as defined in the charter application or subsequent approved amendment(s), if applicable.
Board Accountability	The Board of Trustees is responsible to the school community it serves.
Decision Making and Communication	The school has a clear understanding of decision-making and communication that result in a common sense of purpose for all school constituencies.
Contractual Relationships (if applicable)	The Board of Trustees and school leadership establish effective working relationships with their management company. Changes in the school's relationship with its management company comply with required charter amendment procedures.
Roles and Responsibilities	The school defines and delineates clear roles and responsibilities among board and staff.

Board Oversight	<p>The Board of Trustees regularly and systematically assesses the performance of school administrators against school-wide goals and makes effective and timely use of the evaluations.</p> <p>The Board of Trustees operates with a clear set of goals for the school and has developed a set of tools for understanding progress toward meeting those goals including those outlined in the school's Accountability Plan.</p>
Board Development	Board members receive appropriate and timely professional development.
Personnel	<p>The Board of Trustees employs leadership who demonstrate effective leadership of the school's programs.</p> <p>The school's leadership establishes an appropriate professional climate, resulting in a purposeful learning environment, reasonable rates of retention for effective school leadership, staff, and teachers, and manageable levels of overall staff turnover.</p>

Evidence:

- The Board of Trustees demonstrated that it has a clear understanding of its role in governing the school. The Board's relationship with the school leadership is appropriate and productive. The school leader indicated that she feels supported by the Board.
- The Board indicated that it has no relationship with the Brighter Choice Foundation other than a partnership, and that it had only been that of a tenant/landlord in the past.
- The BoT and administrative focus groups conveyed that the Foundation no longer provides funding to the school. It holds no official role with the school, it is not a management company and there is no contract between the foundation and the school. The Board Chair and Vice-Chair are employees of the Foundation, but serve on the schools' Boards as volunteers. Administrators report that the Foundation provides support to the school through the staff of the Charter Accountability Office. The Foundation is starting other initiatives for BCCSG, such as a teacher surveys.
- The school is sharing some staff with the Brighter Choice CS for Boys, the Brighter Choice Middle School for Girls, and Albany Leadership Charter High School for Girls. These are split in a variety of ways with different percentages of times. There is no long range plan for staffing; the BoT indicated they will address it "one year at a time." Contracts are not in place for shared employees.
- The BoT for the BCCSG and for the Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys hold joint meetings, but do not have identical membership; the parent member is different but is not in place at this time. The Board indicated that parent members were being voted in at the next meeting. The Department has not received a Board of Trustees Questionnaire on this potential member. The Board holds six or eight meetings a year, not the required ten.
- Board members indicated that their relationship with teachers is not formalized and could be better. They felt it would be a good idea to develop the relationship. At present, teachers do not regularly attend Board meetings or make presentations to the Board.

- The Board chair evaluates the school leader, who also completes a self-evaluation. The school leader's performance is also measured through a parent survey. The school leader's performance is then discussed at a Board meeting to determine if merit pay is in order. The Board is considering a self-evaluation but has not conducted one during the term of the charter.
- When asked about evaluations for other administrators, the administrator's group indicated that was an area that "needs work."
- Training for new Board members consists of reviewing old meeting minutes for status understanding and visiting other charter schools, but formal professional development is not in place.
- The school leader reports to the Board at every meeting on a range of topics. It was unclear to the site visit team what the Board does with the information it receives, especially with regard to data.
- The administration reported that its relationship with the Board is positive one. Board members are aware of what is occurring in the school and serve as guides to the school leader.
- The administration reported that the full year calendar was implemented this past summer, with high interest and attendance. The calendar has minimal breaks during the year. The summer program was theme based and highly touted by all focus groups.
- Focus groups indicated that board members supported school events, listened to parents' concerns, and were open and available to the school leader.
- Teachers are employed on yearly contracts. Teachers reported that their relationship with the school leader is "great" and she is accessible, very "hands on."
- Professional development takes place for two weeks in the summer. At teacher requests, specific professional development opportunities are provided during the year. Some professional development occurs at grade level meetings. This professional development is based on teachers' specialties and expertise. Monthly, there is one full day of professional development on such topics as Emotional Intelligence, Response to Intervention or the Student Support Team. There is no formalized method of measuring effectiveness for professional development; teacher feedback and observation is currently used as a measurement tool.
- Teachers make home and shelter visits to each family.
- Teachers meet in teams during the summer to review curriculum and align it with programs such as Writing Workshop (now being phased in). They will move to Reading Workshop in the future.
- Teachers were unaware of the changes in the charter renewal proposal.

COMPLIANCE	
Safety	The school establishes and maintains a physically safe environment for students and staff. The school establishes a healthy environment ensuring civil rights for all.
Facilities	The school provides facilities that meet applicable state and federal requirements, are suited to its programs, and are sufficient to serve diverse student needs.
Staff Qualifications	Staff employed by the school meets all applicable state and federal qualifications and standards.
Implementation of Strategies to Recruit, Place, and Retain Qualified Staff	Activities are funded to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified staff.

Evidence:

- Walk-throughs of the school facility and all classrooms showed that the environment is clean, attractive and physically safe.
- Safety was generally felt to be more than adequate; one exception was the bussing issue, where parents and students felt uneasy about not being picked up or dropped off on time or within a reasonable time limit.
- The desk audit confirmed that all employees are appropriately certified and cleared.

DISSEMINATION	
Dissemination of Best Practices (If applicable)	The school has provided models for replication and best practices.

Evidence:

N/A