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Executive Summary - Charter School Renewal

School:	Charter School for Applied Technologies (CSAT)		
Date(s) of Site-Visit:	October 5, 6, and 7, 2010	**Members of Site-Visit Team:**	Susan Gibbons, Barbara Moscinski, Erica Cervine

I. Introduction/Background Information:

The Charter School for Applied Technologies (CSAT) opened in the fall of 2001 with 700 students in grades K through 6. The school has expanded to grades K through 12 and currently enrolls 1675 students. CSAT is located in the Kenmore -Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District. Approximately 85% of its enrolled students live in the City of Buffalo. The school received a five year charter renewal in January 2006.

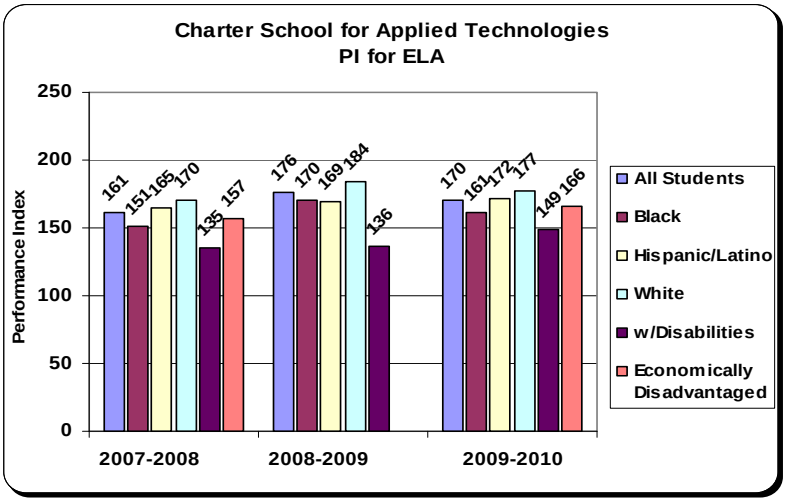
II. Guiding Questions:

A. Can the school demonstrate the ability to operate in an educationally sound manner?

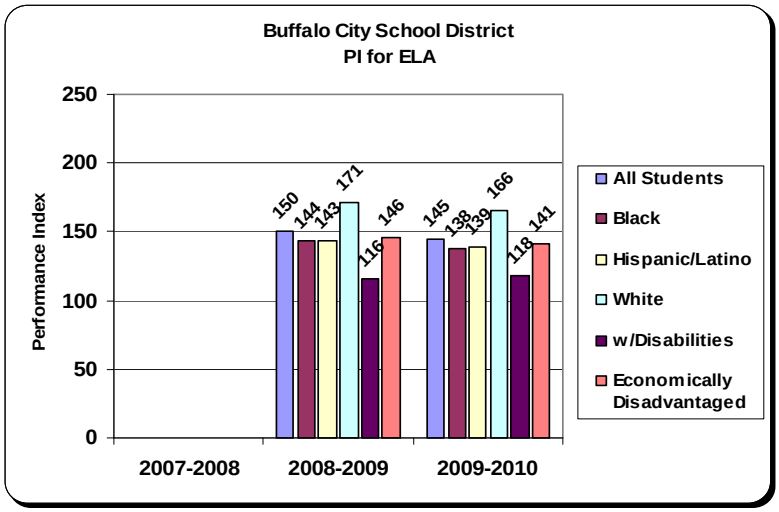
Evidence of Strengths:
The site visit team observed evidence of the school's career preparation theme during classroom observations and review of lesson plans. Visual displays in the school also reflected the career preparation theme. The school makes extensive use of eDoctrina, a data analysis system that provides comparative data on student performance on a variety of assessments. NYMapper is another tool used by the school to create units and lesson plans that align with NYS standards. The academic program is extensive, with strong music and arts components, and numerous electives at the secondary level. In most classrooms observed, students were engaged in meaningful learning activities and there few disruptions from misbehavior. Teachers are configured into teams which share responsibility for student achievement. Teachers also share a team evaluation component, which can result in merit pay for its members.

Academic Performance:
Charter School for Applied Technologies has consistently made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) over the past three years. It has shown consistent growth on state assessments, with very few exceptions. The school has attained its goal of meeting or

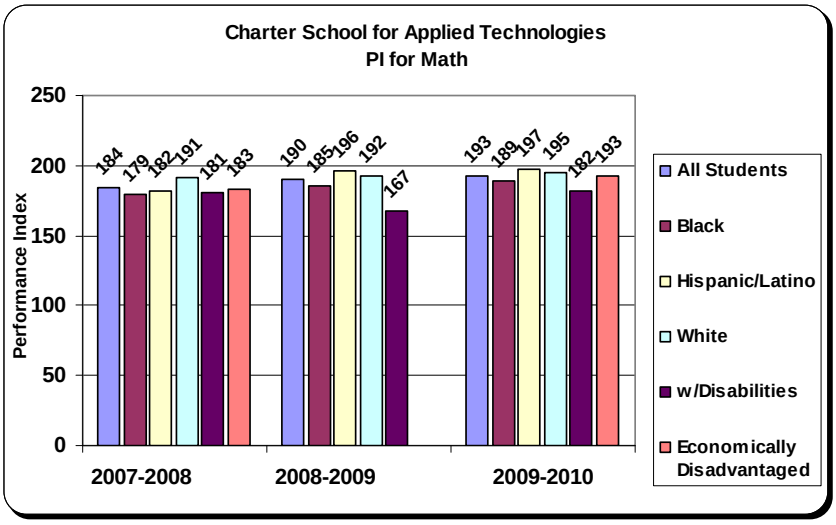
exceeding the state graduation rate for the last two years. It has attained many of its academic program goals of meeting or exceeding the state average on all NYS assessments by the end of the 2010-11 school year.



2008-09 data for Economically Disadvantaged students is unavailable due to insufficient subgroup size



*2007-08 sub-group data unavailable due to appeal
Source: New York State Report Cards



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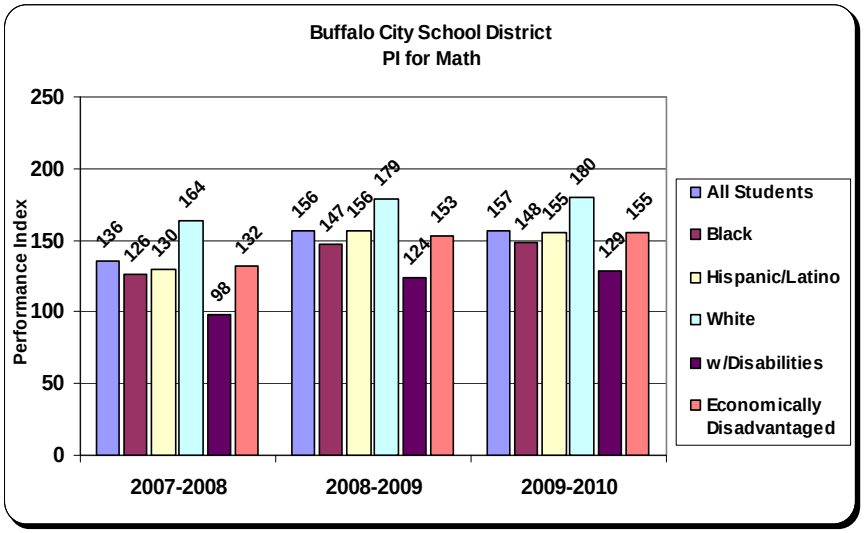

Source: New York State Report Cards

<u>Evidence of Areas of Concern:</u>

The school has not met a few academic goals set in its charter, one of them being the goal that 90% of students entering grades K and 1 will read on grade level by the end of grade 3. The school reports that it has taken steps to address this concern.

B. Can the school demonstrate the ability to operate in a fiscally sound manner?

Evidence of Strengths:
For the fiscal years 2008-09 and 2009-10, the school's certified financial statements showed a positive balance in unrestricted net assets with minimal variance in the balance between operating years. There was a positive ending cash balance for the same two operating years. The school's per pupil expense level decreased during the 2009-10 school year as a result of increased enrollment. The school was able to maintain consistent per pupil expense levels during prior years.

Evidence of Areas of Concern:
The initial review of the fiscal portion of CSAT's renewal application prompted a comprehensive desk audit of the school's fiscal policies and financial data, with follow-up to the school for additional clarification and documentation. Based on the New York State Education Department's (SED) comprehensive fiscal reviews and the SED renewal site visit, fiscal concerns and required actions are as follows:

1. Concern/Finding: The revised five-year budget summary pertaining to the renewal application has a deficit in years two through five ($263,581 in year two and approximately $600,000 for the following three years).
Required Action: Submit to SED an explanation describing the reason for the deficit and a long-term plan to address it no later than February 15, 2011. The plan should be as detailed as the annual budget, and should be carried out to the year that the deficit is addressed.
Required Action: Provide documentation that the board has addressed the reason for the budget deficit, and that the board has approved the deficit budget. This should also be done no later than February 15, 2011.

2. Concern/Finding: CSAT has a contract with Efficient Schools Team (EST), LLC, for management and consultant services. EST was noted in the school's certified financial statements as an affiliated company and both entities, CSAT and EST, share the same board of trustees. EST employs the CSAT superintendent, assistant superintendent, chief financial officer and director of technology full-time. Currently, EST performs services only for CSAT, with CSAT being its sole source of revenue.
Required Action: CSAT must engage in a competitive process (RFP) for procuring educational management consultant services. The RFP proposal for management consultant services must be submitted to SED by March 31, 2011.

3. Concern/Finding: The board indicated, during the renewal site visit interview, that EST does not function as a management company. In addition, SED received documentation on November 10, 2010 referring to EST as a "management organization," management help" and "management consultant."
Required Action: For the purpose of SED definition, present documentation to SED justifying precisely why EST should not be considered a management company. This should be provided by February 15, 2011.

4. Concern/Finding: The superintendent of CSAT is listed as the "Superintendent" on the school's web-site, "Project Manager" in the above mentioned contract with EST, and "President" of EST on that entity's web-site. Another staff member is listed as "Assistant Superintendent" on the school roster submitted to the site visit team, and "Vice-President" of EST on its web-site. In addition, the superintendent has been functioning for more than two years without a contract.
Required Action: Submit documentation to SED that clearly and specifically delineates the roles and responsibilities for the two aforementioned individuals with respect to CSAT and EST by February 15, 2011.
Required Action: Create contracts for all members of the leadership team who do not currently have them in place and provide copies to SED by February 15, 2011.

5. Concern/Finding: The board indicated, during the renewal site visit interview, that it is removed from programmatic aspects of the school. Board meetings are focused primarily on financial matters.
Required Action: The board must undergo professional development regarding its responsibilities other than fiscal, with specific emphasis on academic programs and their implementation. Evidence of this professional development must be received by SED by May 1, 2011.
Required Action: As vacancies occur, the board should identify potential new members who possess educational expertise. The board must adhere to established procedures and timelines when proposing new members to SED.

6. Concern/Finding: The line item expense in the budget for "Educational Consultants" increased $500,000 over two years - from $300,000 in the 2008-2009 fiscal year to $800,000 in the 2010-2011 fiscal year. The majority of the educational consultant expense was payment to EST.
Required Action: Provide documentation of the need for a management consultant and for the increase in the budget over two years by February 15, 2011.

7. Concern/Finding: The Board of Trustees does not have proper procedures in place to review and approve expenditures prior to payment.
Required Action: Develop board policy for approving expenditures. The policy should establish a prepayment review process and establish dollar thresholds for multiple signatures based on the value of the expenditure. Provide documentation of such to SED by February 15, 2011.

8. Concern/Finding: The school was asked to provide additional information regarding the above financial concerns. The school has not submitted all requested information.
Required Action: Submit requested information from desk audit by January 15, 2011.

C. Can the school demonstrate adequate levels of parent and student satisfaction?

Evidence of Strengths:
Parents interviewed were clearly satisfied with the school overall, with a few minor exceptions expressed by individual parents. Parents praised the staff for their support of students and families. All groups interviewed indicated that parents want their children at the school. The school encourages and welcomes parent involvement. Students spoke highly of teachers' commitment to them. All groups interviewed indicated that the school is safe.

Evidence of Areas of Concern:
There are no areas of concern.

D. Can the school demonstrate that it is a viable organization?

Evidence of Strengths:
Board members indicated a strong reliance on the school's leadership team, trusting them to carry out their responsibilities. The school leadership operates as a team, setting the model for the teams of teachers who implement the educational program. School leadership is strong and effective, and it is perceived to be open and supportive of teachers, students and parents. The school has a unique teacher evaluation system, which is based on the work of teams and incorporates the potential for merit pay.

Evidence of Areas of Concern:
The board missed the deadline for submission of its renewal application by two and one-half months. The board is, admittedly, removed from the academic aspects of the school program, focusing almost exclusively on their fiscal responsibilities. The board has added an active member who was not approved by SED. Application materials for the new member have not been submitted to SED.

III. Conclusion

The school showed fidelity to its mission's theme of career preparation, as evidenced in classroom observations and focus group interviews. There is a focus on effective use of data, including a data analysis system that provides immediate feedback. Student achievement has shown consistent growth on state assessments. Parent and student satisfaction is high.

The board is removed from the academic aspects of the school program, focusing on its fiscal responsibilities. The Department has serious concerns with the fiscal viability of the school, and the governance and leadership structure of shared services with the for-profit partnership agency, Efficient Schools Team, LLC.

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Appendix 1

Charter School Longitudinal ELA & Math Data
2007-08 through 2009-2010
Charter School for Applied Technologies (CSAT)

School and Grades	2007-2008				2008-2009				2009-2010			
	%L1	%L2	%L3	%L4	%L1	%L2	%L3	%L4	%L1	%L2	%L3	%L4
CSAT ELA Grade 3	0.8	26	61.8	11.5	0	18	74.2	7.8	12.6	39.3	37	11.1
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 3	12.5	40.5	43	3.9	11.8	39.2	46.5	2.4	32.9	39.1	21.8	6.2
CSAT ELA Grade 4	3.1	25.2	68.7	3.1	4.6	22.9	70.2	2.3	3.7	39.6	53.7	3
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 4	20.6	37	40.2	2.1	9.9	35.9	51.6	2.5	21.9	50.1	25.9	2.1
CSAT ELA Grade 5	0	24.1	74.5	1.4	0	22.3	72.3	5.4	12.6	45.9	36.3	5.2
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 5	5.4	41.6	51.1	1.9	2.7	41.1	52.1	4.2	29.8	44.1	22.4	3.7
CSAT ELA Grade 6	0	49.2	50	0.8	0	21.5	77.7	0.8	6	50	41.8	2.2
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 6	4.2	52.1	42.8	0.9	0.2	36.2	60.6	3	24.2	44.1	30	1.7
CSAT ELA Grade 7	0.7	32.8	65.7	0.7	0	24.8	74.4	0.8	2.3	52.7	39.5	5.4
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 7	6	50.2	43.2	0.5	1.5	36.7	59.8	2	21.7	52.8	21.8	3.7
CSAT ELA Grade 8	2.2	65.4	29.4	2.9	0.8	25.6	71.3	2.3	3.2	56	38.4	2.4
Buffalo CSD ELA Grade 8	13.3	58.8	26.6	1.3	4.8	52.7	41	1.5	20.3	53	24.5	2.2
CSAT Math Grade 3	0	3.8	74.4	21.8	0	1.6	76	22.5	6	50.7	31.3	11.9
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 3	9	24.5	60.4	6	3.7	20.8	69.3	6.1	29.1	43.1	21.3	6.6
CSAT Math Grade 4	2.3	3.1	57.7	36.9	2.3	17.6	53.4	26.7	1.5	24.6	47.8	26.1
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 4	17.6	29.1	46.3	6.9	14.3	21.5	53.2	10.9	19.1	49.6	24.3	7

CSAT Math Grade 5	1.4	14.6	68.1	16	0.8	5.4	64.6	29.2	5.2	37	36.3	21.5
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 5	17	32.8	44.4	5.8	10.6	27.6	50.5	11.4	22.2	46.3	25.7	5.8
CSAT Math Grade 6	0.8	22.4	63.2	13.6	0.8	6.9	74.8	17.6	1.5	28.4	45.5	24.6
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 6	18.1	33	42	6.9	10.8	32.2	48.2	8.8	24.1	45.7	22.5	7.7
CSAT Math Grade 7	0.8	20.3	63.9	15	0	10.2	70.9	18.9	0	29.5	45.7	24.8
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 7	11.4	39.1	43	6.5	5	31.7	55.4	7.9	22.9	45	24.3	7.8
CSAT Math Grade 8	0	18.8	66.9	14.3	0	11	72.4	16.5	1.6	39.4	48.8	10.2
Buffalo CSD Math Grade 8	21.5	44.7	31.4	2.4	9.5	32.6	52.2	5.6	23	51.2	21.1	4.7

Appendix 2

Charter School Longitudinal Data
2007-08 through 2009-2010
Charter School for Applied Technologies

	2006-2007			2007-2008			2008-2009		
Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above	**55**	**65**	**85**	**55**	**65**	**85**	**55**	**65**	**85**
Comprehensive English	81	63	12	99	91	36	98	92	25
Buffalo CSD	80	65	18	83	73	21	81	68	16
Mathematics A	99	90	19	98	95	13	100	100	44
Buffalo CSD	69	46	6	74	54	8	53	26	1
Mathematics B	92	92	33	68	51	0	82	67	5
Buffalo CSD	49	35	9	44	29	4	41	30	5
Integrated Algebra	N/A	N/A	N/A	97	86	4	99	97	4
Buffalo CSD	N/A	N/A	N/A	63	43	5	57	37	3
Geometry	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	94	79	6
Buffalo CSD	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	42	28	4
Global History & Geography	73	55	13	90	74	26	99	87	31
Buffalo CSD	60	44	9	62	46	9	61	45	11
U.S History & Government	84	76	25	97	86	45	96	93	49
Buffalo CSD	84	64	23	87	75	28	81	68	23
Living Environment	91	70	3	88	72	5	100	94	18
Buffalo CSD	68	51	4	74	55	7	74	58	9
Physical Setting/Earth Science	91	77	9	93	62	10	95	78	15
Buffalo CSD	61	37	4	58	39	5	55	33	5
Physical Setting/Chemistry	89	60	0	97	73	2	100	75	7
Buffalo CSD	75	41	3	75	48	3	71	45	4
Comprehensive Spanish	100	100	83	97	82	17	100	91	37
Buffalo CSD	64	43	6	61	41	7	66	52	9