Office of Innovative School Models

Charter Schools

Renewal Report

School: Charter School for Applied Technologies (CSAT)			
Date of Site-Visit:	October 5-7, 2010	**Members of Site-Visit Team:**	Barbara Moscinski, Erica Cervine, 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 Charter School for Applied Technologies ("CSAT") is to provide an excellent academic education with skill sets relevant to careers in applied technologies. We will lay a foundation for: (i) Industry Partnership; (ii) Family Participation; and (iii) Pride and success through Craftsmanship.

Evidence:

- The school is operating in a manner that is faithful to its charter, with a focus on careers and business. This was evident through interviews, class discussions, displays, lessons etc.

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:

Through review of documents, focus group interviews, and classroom observations, the renewal site visit team found evidence of:

- Internships, mentorships, and training opportunities for students that are supervised onsite through ties to local businesses, industrial and labor leaders.
- High academic standards, strict accountability and parent participation to prepare children for success as entrepreneurs, workers, citizens, parents and consumers.
- The school celebrating diversity through a literature-based approach to teaching and learning.
- Project-based and problem-centered instruction.
- Sophisticated technology, which is integrated into curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- An agreement with Erie County Community College to identify and/or design training programs and articulation courses related to a variety of career choices.
- Business partners who are volunteers who assist in building curriculum programming, career touches, job-shadowing opportunities, field trips and clubs and student programs, as well as providing advice to the Board of Trustees and administration.
- Differentiated instruction to address varied learning styles.
- Approved enrollment: K through 12, 1675 students.
- Career preparation theme, visible throughout the school, with evidence of career touches at all grade levels and throughout the buildings. Each class must have at least four career touches per year, although they are not necessarily called that in the lower grades. Criteria for designing them have been tightened up, so they are more than merely field trips, and they must tie into and support the curriculum.
- The special education coordinator is a liaison to the administrative leadership team who supports the teachers to achieve the CSAT mission for special education students. Special education teachers work with assigned grade level teams, but also function as a department with the Special Education Coordinator as the leader.
- There are 174 Special Education students (SPEDs) and approximately 60 English language learners (ELLs).

- Special education enrollment is at about 11% of the student population; Buffalo City School District is at 18%.
- One challenge for CSAT is that it does not have enough students in the same age or same group to offer some services.
- Special education services that are highly regarded by parents. A resource room was seen in the high school; however it was not observed in use. There was no mention of any Section 504 plans.
- Administrative leadership stated that it actively recruits ELLs and SPEDs. ELL enrollment in 2009-2010 was at 43 students; in 2010-2011, it is 60 students. There are several home languages such as Romanian, Arabic, Russian, and Moldavian.

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:

- All parties interviewed agreed that the school community knows they have been achieving passing rates on state assessments; they are now working toward mastery. In response to the recent change in proficiency cut points, CSAT has reduced teacher planning time and increased instructional time in Math and English Language Arts.

CSAT Performance Index:

School Year	ELA - State	ELA - School	Math - State	Math - School
2006-2007	146	146	155	174
2007-2008	154	161	162	184
2008-2009	162	176	168	190

- The Charter School for Applied Technologies is currently a school in good standing in all areas and for all subgroups.

CSAT Assessment History:

ELA	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Grade 3	73	84	48
Grade 4	72	72	57
Grade 5	75	77	42
Grade 6	51	44	44
Grade 7	67	75	45
Grade 8	32	40	41
Math			
Grade 3	96	98	43
Grade 4	95	80	74
Grade 5	84	94	58
Grade 6	77	93	70
Grade 7	79	90	71
Grade 8	81	89	59
Comprehensive English	91	92	86
Math A	95	100	N/A
Math B	51	67	N/A
Integrated Algebra	86	97	95
Geometry	N/A	79	85
Global	74	87	81
U. S. History	86	93	91
Living Environment	72	94	82
Earth Science	0	78	81
Chemistry	73	75	72
Spanish	91	92	96

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:

- On its three accountability goals/objectives, CSAT has attained one, not attained one, and partially attained the third (which does not require realization until the end of the 2010-2011 school year). The graduation rate was 100% for the last two academic years. The goal of having 90% of students entering CSAT in Grades K&1 reading on grade level, as measured by TerraNova's Grade Mean Equivalent, by the end of Grade 3 was not realized. The school has taken steps to correct this, including changing its literacy program and adding a literacy coach and reading intervention teachers to provide additional support to students reading significantly below grade level. The school has attained many of the goals of meeting or exceeding the state average on all NYS assessments by the end of the 2010-2011 school year.
- The school uses eDoctrina, which is a data system that provides immediate feedback to teachers on student performance on internal assessments. Teachers reported that eDoctrina guides their instruction. They hold weekly data meetings in grade level teams to discuss data results. Teachers create goals for instruction based upon data results. Children are provided small group tutoring based upon data results. eDoctrina assists teachers in creating goals, creating common assessments, differentiating by groups and individual students, comparing results across groups, and is used in common planning time. This tool was created by CSAT.
- The NYMapper program, which was created, using CSP Dissemination grant funds, allows teachers to create units and lesson plans that are directly linked to the school's curriculum and the NYS standards. This tool was created by CSAT.

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	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. The school establishes and implements an accommodation plan that addresses the needs of diverse learners.
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.

Evidence:

- The school's academic program is extensive, with strong music and arts components, and many electives at the secondary level, i.e., Forensics, Preparation for the Science Olympiad, Culinary Arts, and Photography.
- Teachers report use of eDoctrina on a daily basis, for creating units out of curriculum, with objectives, power standards, linked to assessments and daily "I can" statements. Training videos have been created by the technology teacher. They are sharing their skills with other schools and providing inservice to other teachers. The program is being considered for adoption by BOCES and will go "nationwide," according to the teacher group.
- The eDoctrina program provides immediate feedback on student achievement and how the achievement relates to the standards. Interventions are provided for students not meeting the standards. These interventions include tutoring during the 10th period for periods of five weeks for high school students, and individual or small group instruction for middle and elementary school students.
- The site visit team reviewed lesson plans in classrooms. Some teachers provided lesson plans using the school's format as displayed in eDoctrina.
- Teachers indicated that career touches are provided at all grade levels. At the lower levels they aren't necessarily referred to as career touches. The Board of Trustees reiterated the same thing. Careers are embedded at every grade level. For example, in a high school science class, as the teacher was concluding his instruction on mineral identification, he explained to the children that the next day they would be learning about igneous rocks. He then said "when you are in college, you will be expected to become familiar with material by reading the information prior to coming to class." He then explained to the class that they would be reading about igneous rocks for homework and would be learning about it the next day.

- Other examples:
    - Kindergarten classes were coloring worksheets with people representing different careers;
    - "Each day is Career Day" appears on the marquee at the high school; and
    - Board of Trustees members continue to initiate and maintain conversations with colleges and local businesses such as General Motors to provide internships and to work with the students.
- Students spoke of the forty hours of required community service prior to graduation and how they try to accumulate hours early in their high school years. Frequently, this experience is career-related.
- Curriculum integration was observed. For example, in a Grade 4 music class the lesson was focused on the breathing system as students took turns labeling a diagram on the board. The growth process was part of the lesson, comparing the pre-adolescent development of boys and girls (voice changes, etc.). The teacher employed strategies to keep the pace moving and the students were eager to participate. The tie between music and biology was clear and relevant. Understanding was checked frequently and fit into the lesson smoothly.
- Small group tutoring is provided to students who are not successful in achieving proficiency for specific performance indicators or standards. In the high school, this is completed during period 10.

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:

- Students in most classes were engaged in the lessons. In these classrooms, students asked meaningful questions related to the lesson, which had a clear purpose with an expected outcome. Many classes were interesting, well paced and under the teacher's control. In the classrooms the renewal team visited, the teacher was able to see and manage what was going on all around the room, even while working with a group or individual. In classrooms where rigor and pacing were adequate, student behavior was not seen to be a problem.

- Two high school classes observed were composed of highly motivated, independent students, sure of their tasks. It was clear that the topics of study and presentation of the lessons were factors in student engagement.
- On the other hand, visitors observed classes where pacing was painfully slow, leaving students with nothing to do while waiting for papers to be handed out or collected, individual students to be disciplined, the teacher trying to gain the entire class's attention, or trying to conduct too many activities at once with differing instructions (i.e., center work, bathroom break and preparation for the next day's lesson). Visitors observed a number of classrooms where one behavior control strategy (clapping, counting down, etc.) that had not been effective the first time did not become effective with subsequent uses. By this point, much time was wasted and disruptive and rude behaviors became the norm. Some lessons were inconsistent with expectations and classroom management techniques varied widely. An interesting observation was that, when coincidentally the same group of students was observed with two different teachers, the behavior on the part of the students was radically different.
- Most elementary level classes begin with "Do Now" on the board and most students went right to work. Teachers engaged students in the assessment of their work, i.e., predict how many correct answers you have, and gave students suggestions for test taking strategies.
- There was heavy use by the teachers of the eDoctrina system to guide instruction in alignment with NYS standards. Using eDoctrina, teacher teams set goals they can meet as a team, assess students individually and re-evaluate overall student performance. The information is in real time. Assessments given in Period One are readily available and teachers can adjust instruction by Period Three. Data is disaggregated on a bimonthly basis.
- Teachers have a daily common team planning time. The merit-based incentive plan encourages teachers to work in teams and not to compete but to work together and to look at how they are doing as a team. At the elementary level the incentive is designed by grade level; at the middle and high schools it is by subject area; and for special areas such as art, and music the NYSMA rubric is used. Teaching teams meet in various configurations during the week, where they hold valuable discussions to develop curriculum, strategies and look at the data. The teams report that they share responsibility in this way for students' success. They feel no competition. There is a strong dedication to the students by the staff. Parents referred to the "phenomenal team approach."
- It was unclear to the site visit team how technology was coordinated and deployed across the school. There are computers in each elementary classroom and yet they were not seen in use. Some use of technology at the high school level was observed. There are middle school technology labs, but the work observed being conducted on the computers was very unsophisticated for eighth grade.
- All three libraries were bustling and busy, and appear to be well used.

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 administration reported that they played a role in the design and changes in the renewal application by focusing more on outcomes than on strict adherence to prescribed teaching methodologies rather than using any possible strategy, removing the "Edison language," and focusing on the academic priorities of mastery.
- The administration operates as a team, and it includes more positions than many schools, such as the Chief Information Officer, the Chief Fiscal Officer, the Director of IT, etc. These individuals are pleased to be included, as they have an opportunity to observe the school operation as a whole.
- Previously, there were three Instructional Coaches on staff, but due to budget constraints there is currently only one. The focus for the Instructional Coach is now on long-term subs, new teachers, and those who switched grades where it made a big difference in curriculum, such as moving from Grade 5 to Grade 1.
- Teacher evaluations are made up of 15% for the individual teacher's evaluation, partly on the team's carrying out of the school mission, as well as student achievement on 3-5 key assessments. Up to a 7% merit raise may be earned for the team. This has proven to be very successful, according to the administrators. An individual teacher's score can be different than that for the team. Target goals are set with the union.
- Teachers feel that the evaluation program is run like a partnership, fair and open, with no competition, and it is child centered. The process is focused on continuing growth. Teachers and administrators work together to focus on data; if instructional goals are met, teachers set personal, professional goals. Each team does a self evaluation, which can result in some surprising conclusions.
- Administrators conduct walk throughs and provide feedback on a daily basis.
- While the administrative team said they are still "embedded in Edison" (the former school management company), the school now has a larger focus on outcomes rather than on compliance; there is a strong professional development component to address this focus. Current priorities demand that the teachers and students know the standards, which are listed in lesson plans and are on display around the school.
- Professional development consisted in part of in-house use of Doug Lemov's book, "Teach Like a Champion," where individual teachers studied strategies and presented them to colleagues. Different grade levels are implementing different strategies to model.

- Teachers talked about a professional learning community that uses data to drive instruction and professional growth. Teachers use their own expertise, training across departments, looking at data trends such as writing weaknesses, as well as gaining expertise from professional development provided outside the school community. These activities include such areas as a Peer to Peer Support Program, Data Driven Decision Making using eDoctrina software, and Response to Intervention.
- A standards-based report card has been developed. They are intent on closing learning gaps and communicate from one grade level to another for this purpose. They want to move from passing to proficiency.
- If teachers need resources, they must document the need and justify the expense. The administration's response is characterized as good. Teachers characterized the administration as very approachable. They grant professional development requests as long as teachers share the information learned with the rest of the staff.

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:

- The facility was bright, clean, and appropriate for its use. The hallways were continually being cleaned by staff. The behavior of children in the hallways was orderly and did not disrupt learning in classrooms. The school has a controlled atmosphere for learning.
- Board members say that they are supportive of school functions and interface with administrators and teachers. The administration concurred, saying that the Board members are present in the building and at outside events. The Board admits it needs good lines of communication with the administration to provide them with data required to make important decisions. Teachers also describe Board members as supportive of school functions, as being present in the school, accessible by email to staff, and known to many personally. The Board holds a picnic for staff each year, their meetings are open, and they trust and defer to educators, as they do not possess that expertise. Some teachers interact with the Board, as when they make presentations on special projects. Students feel comfortable in stating that teachers and administrators care about them.
- Teachers report that they have positive relationships with the administrators, who are approachable, even sharing personal phone numbers, which is very different from the public schools with which they were familiar. They accept suggestions and opinions from staff. The relationship between the administration and the teachers is collegial and productive.

- Regarding communication, parents appreciate teachers' responsiveness to their needs and concerns via email, online, and phone calls. "Teachers are on top of everything." Parents report that individual attention is very helpful to their children, especially with self confidence. Parents and students like the diversity of the school, both geographically and ethnically.
- Teachers report that they work within professional learning communities (PLC) and they can see direct benefits to the staff professionally. They are provided the opportunity, as a team, to pursue professional development goals.
- Teachers work in teams and describe their work as teamwork.
- Discipline is described as progressive, with a focus on de-escalation. Goals are set, data is collected. Behavior intervention teams analyze and disaggregate the data. The VADIR information is more accurate and consistent than in the past. The number of weighted incidents has diminished.
- The Dean of Students works with the specialists in de-escalation techniques and anti-bullying. Incidents of bullying are addressed in their infancy. Teams were observed conferring about individual students.
- The elementary level uses flip cards to record infractions, with green, yellow and red used for different levels of behavior. There is also a "stop box" for a kind of time out. Middle and high school levels use behavior passes, which can be checked up to five times a day. They also function as hall passes. Students are expected to take ownership of their behavior through these systems.
- Parents say the discipline policy helps students to learn, makes them accountable, and forces discussion; they feel that their children are responsive to it. Calls home are frequently positive. Parents like the uniforms, as they help learning and the children take them seriously. Some high school students preferred the prior dress code, or "dressing up." The parents like the fact that everyone recites the school pledge each morning.
- Teachers described a "family sense" about the school. Parents mentioned a "family atmosphere," where "the teachers know everyone."

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:

- All groups indicated that parents want their children at the school, parent involvement is encouraged, the school is very supportive of parents, and counselors reach out to families and identify supports for them.
- The school has a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). It was mentioned, by parents, that leadership on the PTO is "political." Later the superintendent said he believed the comment

was prompted because the school welcomed comments from parents and others felt it was complaining. Parents indicated that a minimum number of people attend functions of the PTO, but the Home-School Association has "potential." Teachers, on the other hand, indicated that the PTO is "great" and does many beneficial things for the school. An Open House recently served 500 spaghetti dinners, and a Fall Festival is expected to draw 1000 families.

- Given the focus on careers, it is appropriate that there is ongoing outreach to local businesses. The school provides ample community service opportunities to students. Students are granted internship opportunities with local businesses including General Motors, where middle school students have been afforded the opportunity to work with engineers. Lessons related to internships are focused on the introduction of concepts, problems, and developing solutions. The school is furthering its relationship with General Motors, wherein they hope to develop eleven internships in the next school year, add engineering to the curriculum, and demonstrate in the classrooms the workplace use for what students are learning.
- The school has a partnership with Trocaire College where students may earn college credit.
- The school's relationship with the district of location, Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda is described as excellent.

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:

- There is broad and consistent use of the eDoctrina system of data analysis to guide instruction in alignment with the New York State Learning Standards. Immediate feedback is used for planning purposes for individuals and groups of students. Curriculum develops from maps that are standardized in language and format, but may make use of "any possible strategies" that the teacher/team may devise.
- Merit incentives are available to teams of teachers. The team can receive up to a 7% merit bonus based upon several evaluation factors. These include an individual performance evaluation, fulfillment of the school's mission as related to careers (team based) and whole group student achievement as demonstrated on 3-5 key assessments.
- The teachers said they are looking forward to the further development of professional learning communities, all report cards being standards-based, an increase in differentiation for students, and closing the achievement gaps in the upcoming renewal charter.

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

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

Evidence:

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. The school had a positive ending cash balance for the same two operating years. The schools 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 over the course of the charter term.

Evidence of Areas of Concern:

Staff's 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, the following fiscal concerns and required actions have been identified:

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). (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

Required Actions – due to SED no later than February 15, 2011:

- Submit to SED an explanation describing the reason for the deficit and a long-term plan to address it. The plan should follow, and be as detailed as, the annual budget template provided in the 2010 new schools application kit/RFP, and should be carried out to the year that the deficit is addressed.
- Provide documentation that the Board has addressed the reason(s) for the budget deficit, and that the Board has approved the deficit budget.
- Prepare a revised, balanced budget for the next charter term.

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. (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

The Board indicated, during the renewal site visit interview, that EST does not function as a management company. However, SED received documentation from the school on November 10, 2010 referring to EST as a "management organization," "management help" and "management consultant."

Required Actions – due to SED no later than January 30, 2011:

- Define and clarify the purpose of, activities and services provided by EST, LLC.
- Provide an organizational chart and management structure map for EST, LLC., and CSAT; indicating all formal and informal shared relationships.
- Provide documentation of appropriate division of finance and accounting practices between EST, LLC., and CSAT.
- If CSAT and SED determine that EST, LLC., is indeed a management company; the school must follow appropriate steps to request a material amendment to its charter from the Board of Regents to add a management company. This request must be received by SED no later than 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. (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

Required Actions – due to SED no later than February 15, 2011:

- Submit documentation to SED that clearly and specifically delineates the roles and responsibilities for the two aforementioned individuals with respect to CSAT and EST.
- Create contracts for all members of the leadership team who do not currently have them in place and provide copies to SED.

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. (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

   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 work to 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. (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

   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.

   (Response to this concern will be provided by the determined date.)

   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.

3. CAN THE SCHOOL DEMONSTRATE ADEQUATE LEVELS OF PARENT AND STUDENT SATISFACTION?

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 parents that were interviewed appeared overtly satisfied with the school. One gentleman indicated that he was an employee of Buffalo City Schools and he sends his child to CSAT. Parents expressed the desire for other children to attend the charter school; they were well aware of the waitlist. Parents were very satisfied that they could pull their child's five-week report up online at anytime. Parents had high praise for the way staff supported families; they go above and beyond to ensure success for children. Parents feel that the administration is there for them, open to their concerns and ideas, they respond immediately to concerns and follow up is always done.
- Parental concerns expressed include lack of instruction in spelling and cursive writing, the need for more extracurricular activities, and information for parents on helping their children with homework. The bus situation was also of concern to the parents – no aides, a poor environment and harassment of some children by others. They expressed concerns about class size, suggesting that it should be lower, but adding that the children are receiving a good education.
- Teachers are also pleased with the home-school communication. They feel that the Board did some self-correcting to adjust to the population as it changed from the first days of the charter. They like the diversity in the classrooms, the fact that the students receive individual attention, that teacher's and school leaders know each student's name, that they make phone calls to the children's homes for good news or to see how students are doing.
- Of the nine students present at the interview, seven had been enrolled at CSAT since its opening. Students were as satisfied with the school as their parents. One student indicated that he came to the school last year because he was being bullied in the public school. Since arriving at CSAT, he has not had any such problems. One student said "coming to this school has been one of the best opportunities I have gotten. I received an internship that is going to help me with what I am going to do in college".
- The students enjoy the extracurricular activities in drama, cheerleading, color guard, clubs, athletics, student government, and special events such as the Science Olympiad. There are intra-school activities such as tutoring and mentoring.
- Counselors assist with the college application process. Students know they can go to the teachers and counselors for assistance and advice. "Every day is career day" means they come to school to work hard and be prepared for the real world. Experiences with internships prepare them for this. They know that career touches mean that people from the outside come to classes to speak with them. They feel that their parents like the safe

atmosphere, and how the teachers help them. The students are very proud of the band and chorus and their efforts. Students at all levels, elementary, middle and secondary, are aware of discipline methods and consequences.

- Students spoke highly of teachers' one on one time with them during advisory time, the safety level of the school, and the fact that "everyone knows everyone" despite the relatively large size of the school.

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	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. 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.
Board Development	Board members receive appropriate and timely professional development.
Personnel	The Board of Trustees employs leadership who demonstrate effective leadership of the school's programs. 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.

Evidence:

- Please see the evidence section under "Financial Management" above.
- The Board of Trustees submitted the school's application for charter renewal two and one-half months late. When questioned as to why the application was late, the Board responded that they were focused on financial situations, not on the renewal application. There is a standing Administrative Report item on the Board meeting agenda and the charter school renewal application was not found in any of these reports. This indicates that the administration failed to realize and remind the Board of the dateline. The response was also that they were dealing with transportation issues and lawsuits with Buffalo CSD. No staff members were available for six weeks over the summer to do the work on the renewal application. Board members indicated that they "took their eyes off the ball" and "missed the forest for the trees."
- The Board of Trustees appears to be somewhat removed from the programmatic aspects of the charter. They referred to their job as a six million dollar corporate business. Board meetings are focused on the budget and the members are engrossed with the financial aspects of the school. The members were not aware of the changes that are contained within the renewal application. They think it has the same design as prior applications and are confident that the Superintendent has kept them up to date over the years on changes that have been made – "hundreds of changes." When asked to explain the changes, they indicated they did not work on the renewal application. They were not able to pinpoint specific changes. When asked if they received a summary of changes before they signed off on it, they said they were aware of changes that occurred over the years. We will respond to its accuracy within the required date.
- The leadership team appeared to have adequate knowledge of the charter and the renewal charter. The Board appeared to be less knowledgeable about the renewal charter and changes contained within it. The Board seems removed from what is going on with grants, changes to the charter, etc.

- The Board has a relationship with EST. They explained that CSAT acts as the parent organization and EST, which is a for-profit company, acts as a subsidiary. EST provides consulting services. At this time, they provide only consultancy services to CSAT. EST is currently under contract by the Health Sciences Charter School. The Board of Trustees created EST because they wanted to remove Edison as a management company. .
- The Board of Trustees meets every three weeks. No Board minutes were submitted in the desk audit for any meetings since June 15, 2010.
- Board members indicated that they feel that they have a "reasonably lean administration." They said they rely heavily on the superintendent and they trust him and the principals.

Areas of Concern:

- When asked about partnerships and if the level rose to that of Institutional Partnerships, as per the Technical Assistance Advisory posted on the CSO website, the board asked what constituted an institutional partnership. It is understood that since careers are a focus of CSAT there would be inquiry into industry partnerships. It is important that the board recognize if these are informal partnerships or Institutional Partnerships.
- Edward Lattman is listed as a Board of Trustees member in the Board minutes commencing on April 13, 2010 through June 15, 2010. The June 15, 2010 minutes indicate that the Board "accepted his election" unanimously. Mr. Lattman was shown as making motions during Board meetings. Mr. Lattman has not been approved by SED as a Board member, nor have his application materials been submitted. At the time of the visit, the Board was reminded that the appropriate procedure should be followed.
- The application for charter renewal was submitted two and one-half months late.

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:

- All groups interviewed felt that the school was safe.

- Parents indicated that they liked the requirement for identification badges, as they provided an additional level of security.
- The facilities are clean, bright, and appropriate for their purpose. Very little student work was displayed in classrooms or in the hallways at the middle and high schools. The high school principal indicated that he was working with the Fire Marshall because student work on the walls was deemed a fire hazard. The parents indicated that they felt the facilities should be larger, with more green space; they need an additional gym and a fine arts building.
- The elementary school had work displayed throughout all halls on all floors. All rooms were large. The high school was remarkably clean.

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

Evidence:

- The school currently holds a dissemination grant through May 30, 2011. They have created a platform that will house unit plans and lesson plans with standards alignment which will be available on nymapper.org. The school has started sharing this resource with all districts in NYS and they will provide ongoing support, until the grant expires. Discussion of a web tool, CDs, training materials, and presentations at the upcoming NYSCATE conference to be held in Rochester, NY occurred. Notification letters about the effort were sent to districts. At CSAT, teachers have mapped about 90% of the curriculum, and they need to develop additional units and lesson plans. The web based tool will ultimately be linked to the SED website. The grant implementation is currently on its timeline. The project manager is Bob Shannon.
- The Board claims “little knowledge” of the Dissemination Grant, just that they “know it exists.”