



# New York State Education Department

***Full Site Visit Protocol  
Performance Framework Version  
2014-2015***

The Regents of The University of the State of New York  
Charter School Office  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, New York 12234  
charterschools@mail.nysed.gov  
518-474-1762

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## Purpose and Overview of the Full Site Visit

The State Education Department Charter School Office (CSO) will evaluate the school's performance in three areas:

1. The school's academic success and ability to operate in an educationally sound manner;
2. The school's organizational viability and its ability to operate in a fiscally sound manner; and
3. The school's faithfulness to the terms of its charter and adherence to the applicable laws and regulations.

The primary purpose of the full site visit to charter schools is for the New York State Education Department Charter School Office (NYSED CSO) to conduct a detailed evaluation of each Regents-authorized charter school's performance. The full site visit is typically conducted at the mid-point of the charter term, generally in year 3.

[The Charter School Performance Framework](#), which is part of the oversight plan included in the charter agreement for each Regents-authorized school, outlines performance benchmarks for school quality in three areas:

1. The school's academic success and ability to operate in an educationally sound manner;
2. The school's organizational viability and its ability to operate in a fiscally sound manner; and
3. The school's faithfulness to the terms of its charter and adherence to the applicable laws and regulations.

The ten Performance Framework benchmarks, listed on the next page, should be used by schools for self-assessment and planning purposes, and are used by NYSED CSO for school evaluation throughout the charter term and to inform renewal recommendations to the Board of Regents.

Full site visits are usually completed in two days, but the length of the visit may be adjusted depending upon the size, location, or other characteristics of a particular school. The team conducting the full site visit is usually comprised of three to five evaluators. During the site visit, team members will interview school stakeholders in focus groups and through surveys, observe classroom instruction, review documents, and evaluate other aspects of the school's operations. This protocol describes the process used to conduct the full site visit.

The full site visit is not intended to provide technical assistance or other advice. Rather, the purpose of the visit is to gather and document evidence of the school's performance. Throughout the full site visit, the team will collect evidence regarding the school's performance relative to the Charter School Performance Framework benchmarks (presented in the next section), identify trends that emerge from the evidence, and develop findings that are summarized in the full site visit report.

## Full Site Visit Benchmarks

The performance benchmarks will be used to frame the full site visit. In evaluating a school's performance, the site visit team will summarize key findings, and include an assessment of whether the charter school exceeds, meets, approaches, or falls far below the assessed performance benchmarks.

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

## Planning and Scheduling the Full Site Visit

Planning and scheduling are key to a productive full site visit that minimizes disruption to student learning. The CSO will make initial contact with the school leader, providing information about the site visit and required documentation.

### Providing Documents for the Full Site Visit

Documentation will be reviewed by the site visit team prior to and during the visit. The CSO full site visit lead will provide the site visit team with relevant documents regarding the school's performance and operations during the charter term, such as charter information, annual report, and site visit reports from previous years. The school will provide the team with documents according to the following guidelines.

At least 30 days before the site visit, the school will email the following documents to the CSO. The team leader will then provide these documents to the team.

- a. **Map** of the school, showing a basic floor plan, including classroom numbers and offices
- b. **Teacher roster** detailing each teacher's teaching area and certification
- c. **Current organization chart**, including staff names and titles, showing the school's reporting structure
- d. **A master school schedule**, showing each teacher's subject area, grade, and location during the site visit
- e. **Board materials**, including a list of current board members and board meeting minutes for a minimum of one year or a time period specified by the CSO lead
- f. **Blank board self-evaluation documents**
- g. **Blank teacher and administrator evaluation forms**
- h. **Student/family handbook**
- i. **Staff handbook and personnel policies**
- j. **A list of curricular documents** used at each grade level
- k. **A list of major assessments** used to inform instruction at each grade level, with a **schedule** outlining dates of administration
- l. **Professional development plans and schedules** for the previous and current school year

The team may request additional documents during or after the site visit.

### Preparing the Full Site Visit Schedule

The team lead, with input from the school leader, will create the site visit schedule. The schedule will be structured in a way that will enable the team to observe various aspects of the school's program. If at all possible, focus groups and meetings will be planned at times convenient for all stakeholders. The site visit schedule is intended to serve as a flexible guide for the day, as the schedule may be adjusted to enable the CSO to gather all pertinent information and documentation. A sample full site visit schedule is shown on the following page.

**Sample Full Site Visit Schedule**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Day One</b>		
7:30 - 8:00 a.m.	Team meeting	Conference room
8:00 - 9:00 a.m.	Team meeting with school leader	School building
9:00 - 10:00 a.m.	School leader focus group	Library
10:00 - 11:30 a.m.	Classroom observations*	School-wide
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Teacher focus group	Library
12:30 - 1:30 p.m.	Team time (including lunch)	Conference room
1:30 - 3:30 p.m.	Classroom observations*	School-wide
3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	Parent/guardian focus group	Library
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.	Team time and follow-up	Conference room
<b>Day Two</b>		
7:30 - 8:00 a.m.	Team meeting	Conference room
8:00 - 9:30 a.m.	Classroom observations*	School-wide
9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Board of Trustees focus group	Library
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Student focus group	Library
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Team time (including lunch)	Conference room
12:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Classroom observations*	Library
2:00 - 5:00 p.m.	Team time and follow-up	Conference room

\*Although the full site visit schedule includes specific classroom observation periods, the team may conduct classroom observations at any time during the site visit.

The major activities to be incorporated into the full site visit schedule are summarized below, along with the full site visit report preparation process.

<p><b>A. Introductory meeting with school leader</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team lead introduces the team members to the school leader and reviews the purpose of the charter full site visit.</li> <li>• The school leader briefly orients the team to the building(s).</li> </ul>
<p><b>B. Focus group interviews</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school leader will inform all members of a focus group population of the opportunity to participate in the interviews and will not hand-pick individuals (except for students) for focus groups.</li> <li>• All board of trustee members and school leaders will participate in their respective focus group interviews.</li> <li>• To the extent possible, the teacher focus group will include teachers representing each grade and core academic subject.</li> <li>• If possible, at least two CSO team members will attend each focus group interview. Team members will pose questions that reflect the priorities of the site visit.</li> <li>• Each focus group interview will be closed to anyone other than team members and the participant</li> </ul>

group.

- Online teacher and parent surveys may be used.

### **C. Classroom observations**

- The CSO team will select a representative sample of classrooms to observe.
- Before the site visit, the school leader will inform school staff that the CSO team will be entering and taking notes in classrooms during the site visit. All classrooms in the school should be made available for observation throughout the two-day site visit.
- On each day of the site visit, the school leader will inform the team of any teacher absences and classes taught by short-term substitute teachers. The team will not conduct observations of short-term substitute teachers, but may observe classes taught by long-term substitute teachers.
- The school leader will encourage teachers to provide lesson plans for each class taught during the site visit.
- The CSO team will conduct classroom observations of approximately 20 minutes each.
- CSO team members will take cues from the teachers and students as to where to sit and, if appropriate, whether to talk with students. Team members will not interrupt the lesson or disrupt classroom activities.
- Team members will use the site visit classroom observation evidence forms to record their ratings and observations regarding each classroom.
- Team members will also observe and record their observations regarding large group activities and transition periods during the site visit.

### **D. Team time**

- Team members will use the scheduled team time to discuss findings, gather additional evidence and data, and conduct follow-up conversations with the school leader(s) and staff.
- At the end of each day, the CSO team will gather to discuss the available evidence and preliminary findings.

### **E. Charter full site visit report preparation**

- The team lead or lead consultant will draft a full site visit report that includes the team's findings and the evidence to support those findings.
- The participating CSO team members will review and reach consensus on any revisions to the draft report.
- The team lead will send the draft report to the school leader and the board chair for factual corrections only. The school will provide factual corrections, if any, to the CSO within ten days of receiving the draft report.
- After the CSO has made appropriate factual corrections to the draft, the CSO will send the final report to the school.

## School Leader Responsibilities

The school leader has several important responsibilities before, during, and after the full site visit. These responsibilities are summarized below.

<b>A. Before the site visit</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review this protocol and speak with school staff to orient them to the purpose of the site visit, explain what to expect during the site visit, and coordinate their involvement, if applicable.</li><li>• Inform the board of trustees, school leadership team members, teachers, students, and parents and guardians of the opportunity to participate in a focus group during the site visit.</li><li>• Identify a secure place (e.g., a small conference room, vacant classroom, or lounge) that can serve as a team meeting room for the duration of the site visit. The space will be used for team discussions, document review, and interviews with members of the school community, if necessary. The team meeting room should be private and have adequate power outlets and/or power cords for team member laptops. If the school has a wireless network, it would be helpful to provide network access information to the team.</li><li>• Provide the CSO with the documents listed in this protocol under “Planning and Scheduling the Full Site Visit.”</li><li>• Prepare for the focus group interviews.</li></ul>
<b>B. During the site visit</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet with the team on the morning of the first day to orient the team members to the school, confirm the schedule sent to the school leader prior to the visit, and discuss the instructional and classroom management strategies that the team can expect to see during the classroom observations.</li><li>• Coordinate the focus group interviews.</li><li>• Be available to the team during the site visit to answer questions, provide additional documents, or facilitate the schedule.</li></ul>
<b>C. After the site visit</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review the draft report and identify any factual corrections after consultation with other school stakeholders. Send factual corrections to the CSO.</li></ul>

## Code of Conduct for Full Site Visit Team Members

This Code of Conduct provides guidance for team members in fulfilling their assigned responsibilities.

1. Review all necessary materials and documents in advance of the site visit.
2. Understand your obligation to conduct the site visit without personal or professional bias and act accordingly.
3. Ensure all of your communications with the school are professional and courteous.
4. Avoid unnecessary disruptions to school and classroom routines while performing your assigned tasks such as classroom observations.
5. Honor scheduled appointments and inform the school leader of significant changes to the agreed-upon schedule.
6. Where appropriate, ensure the confidentiality of school information such as student names, health records, and personnel information.
7. Phrase interview questions without explicit or implied biases.
8. Do not offer personal or professional opinions or recommendations, even if solicited by interviewees.
9. Reject requests from those interviewed to speak “off the record;” all conversations and other evidence gathered during the site visit are considered “on the record.”
10. Do not provide reassurance or warnings regarding charter renewal to school personnel. If appropriate, remind school personnel that the charter renewal report is only one of many sources of evidence used to develop a charter renewal recommendation.
11. Do not evaluate the performance of individuals, either orally or in the charter renewal report.
12. Treat the draft report findings and related evidence as confidential until the CSO accepts and finalizes the report.
13. Refrain from communications with outside individuals or groups, including the media, regarding the status of the report, opinions regarding renewal of the school’s charter, or information about individuals working at the school.

### Sample Focus Group Interview Topics

The following are examples of topics that are likely to be the subject of questions posed by team members in focus group interviews. The team may also have questions on other topics, based upon the documents provided by the school and the evidence gathered by the team during the site visit.

#### School Leaders

- Administrative roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships
- Implementation of the school’s mission and key design elements
- Schoolwide instructional and school management strategies
- Curriculum development, alignment, and planning
- Assessment program and use of data
- Educator and administrator evaluation
- Professional development
- Support for students’ social and emotional health
- School safety
- Family communication and engagement

#### Teachers

- Implementation of the school’s mission and key design elements
- Schoolwide instructional and school management strategies
- Supports, accommodations, and modifications for students with diverse learning needs
- Curriculum development, alignment, and planning
- Assessment program and use of data
- Teacher evaluation
- Professional development
- Support for students’ social and emotional health
- School safety
- Family communication and engagement

<p><b>Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School mission</li> <li>• Reason for enrollment in the school</li> <li>• Academic expectations</li> <li>• Behavioral expectations</li> <li>• Available academic and social supports</li> <li>• Feedback regarding academic performance</li> <li>• School safety</li> <li>• Family communication and engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parents/Guardians</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School mission</li> <li>• Reason for student enrollment in the school</li> <li>• Academic expectations</li> <li>• Behavioral expectations</li> <li>• Available academic and social supports</li> <li>• Feedback regarding student academic performance</li> <li>• School safety</li> <li>• Family communication and engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Board of Trustees</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board composition (structure and recruitment)</li> <li>• Implementation of the school’s mission and key design elements</li> <li>• Board oversight of the school’s academic program</li> <li>• Board oversight of the school’s fiscal operations</li> <li>• Board evaluation of school leader</li> <li>• Board monitoring and evaluation of contract with educational service provider or charter management organization (if applicable)</li> <li>• Board self-evaluation</li> <li>• Real or perceived conflicts of interest</li> <li>• Strategic planning</li> <li>• School safety</li> <li>• Board communication with the school community</li> <li>• Potential charter revisions or upcoming changes</li> </ul>