



New York State Education Department

Full Site Visit Protocol 2013-2014

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 primary purpose of the full site visit to charter schools authorized by the Board of Regents is to conduct a detailed evaluation of the school's performance relative to the school's performance goals and the standards used by the State Education Department Charter School Office (CSO).

The 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.

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, although the team size may vary. During the site visit, team members will interview school stakeholders, 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, identify trends that emerge from the evidence, and develop findings that are summarized in the full site visit report.

Planning and Scheduling the Full Site Visit

Planning and scheduling are key to a productive full site visit that minimizes impacts on the school and student learning during the visit. The CSO will make initial contact with the school leader, who may serve as the liaison for the full site visit or may delegate this role to another school staff member.

Providing Documents for the Full Site Visit

Before the full site visit, the CSO will provide the site visit team with relevant documents regarding the school's performance and operations to date during the charter term, such as charter information and site visit reports from previous years. In addition, the school will provide documents to the CSO in advance of the site visit and provide the team with other documents, or access to other documents, during the site visit. These documents are listed below.

1. Documents provided by the school BEFORE the full site visit

At least 30 days before the site visit, the school will send the following documents to the CSO, in electronic form (Microsoft Word or pdf format) if possible. The CSO will then provide these documents to the team.

- a. **Map** of the school, showing a basic floor plan, classroom numbers and teacher names, and offices
- b. **Teacher roster** detailing each teacher's teaching area and certification
- c. **Current organization chart** showing all staff positions and the school's reporting structure
- d. **Teacher schedules** showing each teacher's subject area, grade, and location during the site visit
- e. **Board materials**, including a list of current Board members and the Board meeting agendas and minutes for the period since the beginning of the current school year

2. Documents provided by the school DURING the full site visit

The school will assemble the following documents, or provide access to the documents, for the team’s review during the site visit.

- a. **Board materials**, including all approved board policies; Board self-evaluation documents; and agendas, minutes, and Board packets for Board meetings for the duration of the charter term
- b. **Curricular documents**, including alignment documents, lesson plans, student work, and internal assessment documents
- c. **Professional development plans and schedules** for the previous year and the current year of the charter term
- d. **Blank educator and administrator evaluation forms**
- e. **Student/family handbook**
- f. **Staff handbook and personnel policies**

The team may request other school documents during or after site visit.

Preparing the Full Site Visit Schedule

The team’s individual and focus group interviews as well as the classroom observations must be scheduled in advance. At the same time, however, the site visit schedule must be sufficiently flexible to enable the team to move around the school, interview staff members that are not listed in the schedule, observe classrooms or other activities that are not on the schedule, conduct additional interviews in order to follow up on issues warranting further inquiry, and review documents other than those provided in advance. Keep in mind that the schedule enables the team to observe all aspects of the school’s program, including mission-related activities. A sample full site visit schedule is shown below.

Sample Full Site Visit Schedule

Time	Activity	Location
Day One		
7:30 - 8:00 a.m.	Team meeting	Conference room
8:00 - 9:00 a.m.	Team meeting with school leader and initial review of on-site school documents	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 debrief and follow-up	Conference room
Day Two		
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 debrief 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 visit report preparation process.

A. Introductory meeting with school leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The team lead introduces the team members to the school leader and reviews the purpose of the charter renewal site visit.• The team lead asks the school leader to describe the instructional and classroom management practices that the team will see during the classroom observations, and to identify, in particular, <i>three</i> main instructional practices that will be observable in the classrooms. This information will be used during classroom observations.• The team asks the school leader to describe the school’s approach to differentiated instruction. This information will be used during classroom observations.• The school leader briefly orients the team to the building(s).
B. Focus group interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school informs all members of a focus group population of the opportunity to participate in the interviews and does not hand-pick individuals (except for students) for focus groups.• Whenever possible, all Board of Trustees members and school leaders participate in their respective focus group interviews.• To the extent possible, the teacher focus group includes teachers representing each grade and core academic subject.• The student focus group includes students representing grade 3 and higher.• The parent and family focus group consists of volunteer members of the parent and family community.• At least two team members will attend each focus group interview. Team members pose questions, prepared in advance, pertaining to the school’s performance and operations.• Each focus group interview is closed to anyone other than team members and the participant group.
C. Classroom observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Before the site visit, the school leader informs school staff that the team will be entering and taking notes in classrooms during the site visit. All school classrooms in the school will be made available for observation throughout the two-day site visit.• On each day of the site visit, the school leader informs 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 team ensures that the classrooms selected for observation include a representative sample from each grade level and core academic subject.

- The team conducts approximately 30 classroom observations, each of which spans a minimum time period of approximately 20 minutes.
- 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 use the Site Visit Classroom Observation Evidence Worksheet to record their ratings and observations regarding each classroom.
- Team members also observe and record their observations regarding large group activities and transition periods during the site visit.

D. Team time

- Team members use the scheduled team time to review documents on site, gather additional evidence and data, and conduct follow-up conversations with the school leader and staff.
- At the end of each day, the team convenes a debrief session to discuss the available evidence and the preliminary findings suggested by that evidence.

E. Full site visit report preparation

- The team lead drafts a full site visit report that includes the team's findings and the evidence to support those findings. The team reviews and reaches consensus on any revisions to the draft report.
- Within approximately 30 days of the site visit, the team lead sends the draft report to the school leader and the Board chair for factual corrections only. The school provides 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 sends 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.

A. Before the Site Visit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review this Protocol and speak with school staff to orient them to the purpose of the site visit, to explain what to expect during the site visit, and to coordinate their involvement, if applicable.• Inform the Board of Trustees, teachers, students, and parents and guardians of the opportunity to participate in a focus group during the site visit.• 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.• Provide the CSO with the documents listed in this <i>Protocol</i> under “Planning and Scheduling the Full Site Visit.”• Prepare for the focus group interviews.
• During the Site Visit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet with the team on the morning of the first day to orient the team members to the school, to confirm the schedule sent to the school leader prior to the visit, and to discuss the instructional and classroom management strategies that the team can expect to see during the classroom observations.• Coordinate the focus group interviews.• Provide the team with the documents, or access to the documents, listed in this <i>Protocol</i> under “Planning and Scheduling the Full Site Visit.”• Be available to the team during the site visit to answer questions, provide additional documents, or facilitate the schedule.
• After the Site Visit
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the draft report and identify any factual corrections after consultation with other school stakeholders. Send factual corrections to the CSO.• If desired, send a written response to the final report.

Code of Conduct for Full Site Visit Team Members

The full site visit team's conduct can significantly affect the team's ability to obtain and report evidence regarding the school's performance as well as the perceptions of the school community about the objectivity of the report. This Code of Conduct provides guidance for team members in fulfilling their assigned responsibilities.

1. Ensure that you have reviewed all necessary materials, including this Protocol and the documents and information provided in advance of the charter full site visit by the CSO and the school.
2. Understand your obligation to conduct the site visit without personal or professional bias and act accordingly.
3. Ensure that 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 school performance to school personnel; if appropriate, remind school personnel that the full site visit report is an opportunity to reflect on performance and is only one of many sources of evidence that will be used by the CSO in the future to develop a charter renewal recommendation.
11. Do not evaluate the performance of individuals, either orally or in the charter full site visit report.
12. Treat the draft report findings and related evidence as confidential until the report is finalized and accepted by the CSO.
13. Refrain from communications with outside individuals or groups, including the media, regarding the status of the report or opinions regarding the school or individuals working at the school.

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

Appendix B: Classroom Observation Tools

NYSED Charter School Office - Site Visit Classroom Observation Evidence Worksheet

PLEASE ATTACH ANY WORKSHEETS, LESSON PLANS, OR OTHER MATERIALS USED BY THE TEACHER

Observer's Name: _____ School: _____ Date: _____
 Grade _____ Subject: _____ Teacher: _____ Time in Class: _____ to _____
 # of Students: _____ # of Adults and Roles _____

Part of Class
<input type="checkbox"/> Beginning
<input type="checkbox"/> Middle

NA – Not Applicable 0 -- No evidence 1 – Partial evidence 2 – Clear and Consistent Evidence

Please fill in the sections one and two for use during the observation based on information provided by the school leader. Performance Benchmarks noted apply only to schools chartered in 2012 or later.

Instructional Practice	NA	0	1	2
Performance Framework Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning, Indicators 8 and 9				
1. Three main instructional practices identified by the school leader are observed. <i>Please list practices below based on conversation with school leader. Benchmark 2, Indicators 8 and 9</i>				
A.				
B.				
C.				

Comments/Evidence:

2. Differentiation, as defined by the school leader, is observed. <i>Please define below based on conversation with school leader. Benchmark 2, Indicators 8 and 9</i>				
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Comments/Evidence:

Instructional Practice Performance Framework Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning, Indicators 8 and 9	NA	0	1	2
3. Teacher checks for understanding/gives feedback. <i>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8 and 9</i>				

Comments/Evidence:

4. Provides rigorous tasks that require higher order thinking to ensure student success. <i>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8 and 9</i>				
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Comments/Evidence:

Classroom Environment Performance Framework Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning, Indicators 8, 9 and 10 Performance Framework Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate and Family Engagement, Indicator 1	NA	0	1	2
5. Classroom climate is characterized by high, clear expectations for student behaviors and routines. Describe any observable whole-school strategies. <i>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9 and 10, Benchmark 3, Indicator 1</i>				

Comments/Evidence:

6. Pacing, transitions and instructional activities are maximized for student learning. <i>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9 and 10</i>				
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Comments/Evidence:

7. Students participate and are engaged in learning. <i>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9 and 10</i>				
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Comments/Evidence:

Observation Category	Performance Framework	0 – No or limited evidence	1 – Partial Evidence	2 – Consistent Evidence
Instructional Practice				
1. Three main instructional practices identified by the school leader are observed.	Benchmark 2, Indicator 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructional practices identified by school leader are rarely observed in classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the instructional practices identified by the school leader are observed in some of the classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The instructional practices identified by the school leader are evident in nearly every classroom observed
2. Differentiation, as defined by the school leader, is observed.	Benchmark 2, Indicators 8,9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school leader’s description of differentiation is not observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few aspects of the school leader’s description of differentiation are observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated instruction is evident and matches the description provided by the school leader
3. Teacher checks for understanding/gives feedback.	Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checks for completion of tasks but not on student progress toward mastery of objective(s) Lesson progresses without a means of gauging student understanding Does not adjust instruction or supports based on results of checks for understanding; student responses reveal misconceptions that are not corrected/addressed Questions hold few students accountable for formulating responses; predominately calls on volunteers and, at times, teacher answers own questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors progress toward the objective(s) but the checks for understanding are infrequent, not varied, and/or do not assess some students (for example thumbs up/down, ticket to leave, etc.) Occasionally adjusts instruction or supports based on results of checks for understanding; inconsistently addresses students’ misconceptions Questions hold some students accountable to formulate responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitors all students’ progress toward the objective(s) throughout the lesson using varied, frequent checks for understanding Frequently adjusts instruction or supports in real time based on results of checks for understanding; students’ misconceptions are corrected or addressed Questions require all students to express what they know or are able to do Students receive immediate and explicit feedback to guide their learning

***Differentiation** may be based on individual students’ academic needs, language proficiencies, physical/social/emotional needs, interests, and/or culture.

Observation Category	Performance Framework	0 – No or limited evidence	1 – Partial Evidence	2 – Consistent Evidence
<p>4. Provides rigorous tasks* that require higher order thinking** to ensure student success.</p>	<p>Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learn facts and approach tasks in rote ways, with little connection to ideas and issues beyond the classroom • Few students are observed thinking through the work because tasks lack rigor or are overly scaffolded • Students answer questions with limited or single word answers and are not asked to share their reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may approach tasks and responses with some original thought or connection to ideas and issues beyond the classroom • Some students are observed thinking through the work, while tasks are not rigorous enough or are too scaffolded for others • Students’ responses may include some higher-level thinking, but majority of answers are lower-level; some students share their reasoning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students extend their learning by formulating hypothesis, analyzing data, solving problems, and creating solutions for real world situations to deepen their understanding of the content/learning objective(s) • Most students are engaged in rigorous tasks requiring them to demonstrate creativity and critical thinking • Students construct viable arguments and questions to critique others’ reasoning by responding to one another, analyzing similarities and differences, and justifying conclusions; most students share their problem-solving process
<p>*Rigorous tasks require considerable cognitive effort and may involve some level of struggle for students as they transfer their prior understanding to new situations. These tasks demand that students monitor their cognitive processes as they engage in the task. Rigorous tasks support robust student learning of a lesson’s content objective(s). **Higher order thinking: Students acquire and evaluate knowledge, analyze and evaluate evidence, synthesize multiple peices/sources of information and reason effectively before making judgments or decisions.</p>				
<p>Classroom Environment</p>				
<p>5. Classroom climate is characterized by high, clear expectations for student behavior and routines.</p>	<p>Benchmark 3, Indicator 1, Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9, 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules are unclear or not followed/enforced • Lack of routines and procedures • Respectful interactions teacher[s]↔student[s]↔student[s] are not observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom rules and routines are established • Some positive and respectful interactions observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom rules and routines are established and internalized by students • Majority of interactions observed are positive and respectful

Observation Category	Performance Framework	0 – No or limited evidence	1 – Partial Evidence	2 – Consistent Evidence
6. Pacing, transitions and instructional activities are maximized for student learning	Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall lesson is inappropriately paced • Students may sit idle with no clear understanding of what to do • Relationships between activities and learning goals are unclear • Significant time is spent on behavior management, transitions, and other details that are not related to learning goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher spends inappropriate amount of time on a given activity in the lesson • Some students are left without clear understanding of what to do • Most activities relate to and support learning goals • Some time is spent on behavior management, transitions, and other details that are not directly related to learning goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson is appropriately paced and scaffolded • Students have a clear understanding of what to do and work productively • Activities directly relate to and support learning goals • Minimal time is spent on transitions and other details that are not directly related to learning goals
7. Students participate and are engaged in learning.	Benchmark 2, Indicators 8, 9, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher provides no opportunities for students to participate or engage in the lesson • Students do not do what is expected by the teacher • Students do not take responsibility for their work without teacher direction • Student behavior appears to indicate disinterest in the lesson (posture, eye contact, persistence, level of participation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher provides some opportunities for student engagement • Some students do what is expected by the teacher • Some students take responsibility for their work without teacher direction • Student behavior appears to indicate some interest in the lesson (posture, eye contact, persistence, level of participation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher provides several opportunities for student engagement • Most students do what is expected by the teacher • Most students take responsibility for their work without teacher direction • Students behavior appears to indicate engagement in the lesson (posture, eye contact, persistence, level of participation)

Performance Framework Benchmarks and Indicators Applicable to Classroom Observations

Benchmark 2: Teaching and Learning: School leaders have systems in place designed to cultivate shared accountability and high expectations and that lead to students' well-being, improved academic outcomes, and educational success. The school has rigorous and coherent curriculum and assessments that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) for all students. Teachers engage in strategic practices and decision-making in order to address the gap between what students know and need to learn so that all students experience consistent high levels of engagement, thinking and achievement.

8. Teachers use instructional practices and strategies to meet established student goals and promote high levels of student engagement and inquiry.

9. Teachers provide students with a wide variety of ways to engage in learning that enable students to achieve individual goals.

10. The school creates a safe environment that is tailored to the strengths and needs of all students and leads to high levels of student engagement and inquiry.

Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Family Engagement: The school has systems in place to support students' social and emotional health and to provide for a safe and respectful learning environment. Families, community members and school staff work together to share in the responsibility for student academic progress and social-emotional growth and well-being. Families and students are satisfied with the school's academics and the overall leadership and management of the school.

1. The school has a clear approach to behavioral management, including a written discipline policy.