



New York State Education Department

Charter Renewal Site Visit Protocol 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

Table of Contents

Purpose and Overview of the Charter Renewal Site Visit.....	1
Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit.....	2
Providing Documents for the Charter Renewal Site Visit	2
Preparing the Charter Renewal Site Visit Schedule	2
School Leader Responsibilities.....	6
Code of Conduct for Charter Renewal Site Visit Team Members.....	7
Appendix A: Sample Focus Group Interview Topics	8

Purpose and Overview of the Charter Renewal Site Visit

The primary purpose of the charter renewal site visit to charter schools authorized by the Board of Regents is to conduct a detailed evaluation of the school's performance. The charter renewal application guidelines can be found [here](#).

The charter renewal site visit report, along with other sources of evidence, informs the charter renewal decision, which is based on the school's performance over the term of the charter 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 charter renewal process begins with the school's submission of an Application for Charter Renewal to the CSO. After the CSO has reviewed the Application for Charter Renewal and determined it is complete, the CSO will arrange for a team of evaluators to conduct a charter renewal site visit. Charter renewal site visits are generally completed in two days by a team comprised of three to five evaluators. 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 charter renewal site visit.

The charter renewal 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 charter renewal 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 charter renewal site visit report.

The priorities considered by the CSO and the Board of Regents during the renewal process are set forth in the Renewal Policy authorized by the Board of Regents and renewal regulation Section 119.7 of the Commissioner's Regulations. A school's renewal recommendation is informed by evidence collected throughout the entire charter term—such as annual reports, independent financial audits, state testing data, and all site visit reports—as well as additional information gathered during the charter renewal process. The CSO shares the renewal recommendation with the Board of Regents, which votes either to grant or to deny the school's request for charter renewal.

Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit

Planning and scheduling are key to a productive charter renewal 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 Charter Renewal Site Visit

Documentation will be reviewed by the site visit team prior to and during the visit. The CSO renewal 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, the Application for Charter Renewal, 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** showing all staff positions and 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 the Board meeting agendas and minutes for a minimum of one year or a time period specified by the CSO lead
- f. **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. **Standardized internal assessment data** provided in the aggregate, as well as disaggregated by grade level and subject area¹
- m. **Professional development plans and schedules** for the previous and current school year
- n. **A description of efforts to recruit and retain SWDs, ELLs, and FRPL-eligible students**, including all targeted recruitment efforts, recruitment mailings, and meetings with community groups

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

Preparing the Charter Renewal 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 charter renewal site visit schedule is shown below.

¹ The provided data will be appended to the school's renewal site visit report. Do not include student-level data.

Sample Charter Renewal Site Visit Schedule

Time	Activity	Location
Day One		
8:00 – 8:15 a.m.	Team orientation to building	Conference room
8:15 - 9:00 a.m.	Team meeting with school leader	Conference room
9:00 - 10:30 a.m.	School leadership team focus group	Library
10:30 - 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		
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, follow up meetings with individual staff, school leadership team focus group follow up	Library
2:00 - 5:00 p.m.	Team debrief and follow-up	Conference room

The major activities to be incorporated into the charter renewal site visit schedule are summarized below, including the renewal site visit report preparation process.

A. Introductory meeting with school leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CSO team lead will introduce the team members to the school leader and review the purpose of the charter renewal site visit. • The CSO team will ask the school leader to describe the instructional and classroom management practices the team will see during the classroom observations, and to identify, in particular, three main instructional practices that should be observable in the classrooms. This information will be used during classroom observations. • The school leader will briefly orient the CSO team to the building(s).

B. Focus group interviews

- 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.
- All board of trustee members and school leaders will participate in their respective focus group interviews.
- To the extent possible, the teacher focus group will include teachers representing each grade and core academic subject.
- The student focus group will include students representing grade 3 and higher.
- 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.
- Each focus group interview will be closed to anyone other than team members and the participant 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 review documents on site, 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 renewal site visit report preparation

- The team lead will draft a charter renewal site visit report that includes the team's findings and the evidence to support those findings. The report will not include a recommendation regarding charter renewal.
- 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 charter renewal 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, explain what to expect during the site visit, and coordinate their involvement, if applicable.• 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.• 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 protocol under “Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit.”• Prepare for the focus group interviews.
B. 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, 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.• Coordinate the focus group interviews.• Be available to the team during the site visit to answer questions, provide additional documents, or facilitate the schedule.
C. 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.

Code of Conduct for Charter Renewal 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.

Appendix A: Sample Focus Group Interview Topics

Examples of topics covered during focus group interviews are listed below. The team may also request clarification or require additional information about other topics not included in the list below.

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

Students
<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
Parents/Guardians
<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
Board of Trustees
<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