



New York State Education Department

Charter Renewal Site Visit Protocol for Board of Regents-Authorized Charter Schools

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Purpose and Overview of the Charter Renewal Site Visit

The primary purpose of the renewal site visit to Board of Regents-authorized charter schools is to supplement and validate the information collected over the charter term by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Charter School Office (CSO). This information is used to inform the action taken by the Board of Regents to approve, modify, or disapprove the charter school's request for renewal. In advance of action by the Board of Regents, the CSO prepares a renewal recommendation that is based on the school's performance in three broad areas:

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

The priorities that are considered by the CSO and the Board of Regents in the renewal process are set forth in the [Board of Regents-authorized Charter School Renewal Policy](#) and [8 NYCRR 119.1](#). The [Charter School Performance Framework](#) was adopted by the Board of Regents in 2012 and updated in 2015. The CSO's renewal recommendation to the Board of Regents is based on the school's performance across all benchmarks in the Performance Framework over the entire charter term, and occasionally, in cases of short-term renewals, the previous charter term. This evidence includes, but is not limited to, information provided in annual reports, independent financial audits, state testing data, site visit reports, other communications. Additional information is collected throughout the charter renewal process.

Although all charter schools should be working toward the standards for renewal throughout the charter term, the formal charter renewal process begins with the school's submission of the [Application for Charter Renewal](#). After the CSO has reviewed the Application for Charter Renewal and determined that it is complete, the CSO will arrange for a team of two or more evaluators to conduct a charter renewal site visit. Charter renewal site visits are differentiated in length and scope based on adherence to the benchmarks set forth in the Performance Framework over the charter term. Visits may range in length from a half day to two days. During the site visit, the CSO team will interview school stakeholders and observe classroom instruction. In addition, the CSO team may evaluate other aspects of the school's operation while on site.

Ultimately, the renewal process offers an opportunity for the school community to reflect on its experiences during the charter term as it comes to an end and to make a compelling, evidence-based case that it has met the rigorous academic, organizational, and legal standards for the granting of an additional charter term. The charter renewal site visit is not designed to offer technical assistance. Rather, the purpose of the visit is to gather and document evidence of the school's performance, as well as gain a better understanding of school-level effective strategies and problems of practice. The CSO will make every effort to provide the charter school with a summary of findings within five weeks of the completion of the visit.

Charter Renewal Site Visit Benchmarks

To evaluate the school's performance and inform the renewal recommendation provided to the Board of Regents, the CSO will summarize key findings and include an assessment of whether the charter school exceeds, meets, approaches, or falls far below the performance benchmarks¹ listed on page 3, using the scale below.

Level	Description
Exceeds	The school meets the performance benchmark; potential exemplar in this area.
Meets	The school generally meets the performance benchmark; few concerns are noted.
Approaches	The school does not meet the performance benchmark; a number of concerns are noted.
Falls Far Below	The school falls far below the performance benchmark; significant concerns are noted.

¹ A school may not receive ratings for all ten Performance Benchmark in their renewal site visit report.

Performance Benchmark	
Educational Success	Benchmark 1: Student Performance: The school has met or exceeded achievement indicators for academic trends toward proficiency, proficiency and high school graduation. At all grade levels and all assessments, scoring proficiently means achieving a performance level of 3 or higher (high school Regents and Common Core Regents exam score of 65 or higher).
	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 New York State Learning Standards (NYSLS) 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.
	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.
Organizational Soundness	Benchmark 4: Financial Condition: The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.
	Benchmark 5: Financial Management: 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.
	Benchmark 6: Board Oversight and Governance: 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.
	Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity: 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.
Faithfulness to Charter & Law	Benchmark 8: Mission and Key Design Elements: The school is faithful to its mission and has implemented the key design elements included in its charter.
	Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention: 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.
	Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance: The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.

Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit

The CSO lead, who is the school's point of contact for the renewal visit, will make initial contact with the board chair and school leader, providing information about the proposed date(s) and length of the renewal site visit, as well as requesting documentation. All renewal site visits will be scheduled and conducted between September and mid-December of 2017.

Providing Documents for the Charter Renewal Site Visit

All relevant documents, including the school's renewal application, annual reports, academic outcomes and enrollment information submitted through the Student Information Repository System, teacher survey results, prior site visit reports, and other communications between the CSO and the school will be reviewed by site visit team members. The school will provide the team with additional documents according to the following guidelines:

At least 21 days before the site visit, the school will supply the following documents to the CSO lead:

- a) Renewal Site Visit Workbook
- b) Current organization chart, including names and titles
- c) A master school schedule
- d) Map of school with room numbers and teacher names
- e) Board materials (roster, minutes, and strategic plan, if applicable)
- f) Board self-evaluation processes and documents
- g) Student/family handbook
- h) Staff handbook and personnel policies
- i) A list of major assessments
- j) Teacher and administrator evaluation processes
- k) Interventions offered at the school
- l) School-conducted surveys of teachers, parents, and/or students, and/or NYC DOE surveys
- m) Professional development plans and schedules
- n) Efforts towards achieving enrollment and retention targets

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

Preparing the Charter Renewal Site Visit Schedule

After a thorough review of all applicable documents by all members of the site visit team, the CSO lead will work with the school leader to create the site visit schedule. The schedule for the visit will include focus groups with board of trustee members, school leaders, and potentially other school stakeholders, as well as classroom observations. The information gathered in the site visit will be used, in part, to substantiate the assessment of benchmark performance. Additional supporting documentation and follow-up conversations may be requested after the site visit.

Every effort will be made to schedule focus groups and meetings at times convenient for all stakeholders. The need for focus groups for each visit will be individualized by school as identified by the CSO team lead. The site visit schedule is intended to serve as a flexible guide and may be adjusted so as to enable the CSO team to gather all pertinent information and documentation. A sample renewal site visit schedule is shown on the following page.

Sample Charter Renewal Site Visit Schedule

Time	Activity	Location
7:30 – 8:00 a.m.	Introductory meeting and overview of the day with school leadership	Conference room
8:00 – 8:30 a.m.	Parent focus group	Conference room
8:30 – 9:30 a.m.	School leadership focus group	Conference room
9:45 – 11:30 a.m.	Classroom observations (with an instructional leader)	School-wide
11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Teacher focus group	Library
12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	CSO team meeting	Conference room
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Classroom observations (with an instructional leader)	School-wide
3:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Meet with leadership responsible for special populations and/or special population specific classroom observations	Conference room
3:30 – 4:30 p.m.	Board focus group*	Conference room
4:30 – 5:00 p.m.	Team time	Conference room
5:00 – 5:30 p.m.	Closing meeting with school leadership	Conference room

* Board members may participate by phone or video.

Renewal Site Visit Activities and Expectations

1. Introductory meeting with school leader: The CSO team lead will provide an overview of the visit and the school leader will briefly orient the team to the building(s).
2. Focus group interviews
 - The school invites all members of a focus group population to participate in the interviews and does not hand-pick individuals for focus groups.
 - Whenever possible, all members of the school’s board of trustees and school leadership team participate in their respective focus group interviews.
 - To the extent possible, the teacher focus group includes teachers representing each grade and core academic subject.
 - CSO team members pose questions to collect additional evidence that supports the Charter School Performance Framework benchmarks.
 - Each focus group interview is closed to anyone other than team members and the participant group.

3. Surveys

- The CSO lead will request the most recent internal parent, student, and teacher survey results from the school leader and request that the school administer the electronic NYSED surveys. All NYSED administered surveys must be conducted in a way that preserves the survey-takers' anonymity so survey participants feel comfortable providing their unbiased opinions or observations.
- To administer the anonymous NYSED survey, a link will be shared with the school leader. The school will send the survey link to all stakeholders prior to the site visit, and communicate the purpose and due date of the survey to the participant group. The school leader will copy the CSO lead on all communication. A translated survey may be available.

4. Classroom observations

- The CSO team selects a representative sample of classrooms to observe. This may be a random selection or based on data received through the renewal process.
- CSO team members will observe classroom instruction together with an instructional leader for that subject area or grade level. Ideally, the person accompanying the CSO team on classroom observations provides regular feedback to the teacher being observed. Whenever possible, CSO team members will separate and observe different classrooms simultaneously. It is requested that more than one instructional leader be available so that each CSO team member is accompanied during their respective observations.
- Prior to the observation, the instructional leader will describe the content being taught in the classroom being observed and the instructional strategies the CSO team should expect to see being utilized in the classroom. The CSO team member and instructional leader will observe the classroom together for approximately 15-20 minutes. After the observation, the CSO team member and the instructional leader will discuss the instruction that was observed, whether that instruction meets the expectations of the school, and what feedback the instructional leader would provide to the teacher(s) being observed.
- On the day of the site visit, the school leader will inform the CSO lead of any teacher absences and classes taught by short-term substitute teachers as well as any assessments that are being administered. The team will not conduct observations of short-term substitute teachers but may observe classes taught by long-term substitute teachers.
- The CSO classroom observation worksheet can be found in Appendix B of this document.

School Leader Responsibilities Before the Site Visit

1. Review this protocol with school staff and teachers to orient them to the purpose of the site visit, explain what to expect during the site visit, and coordinate their involvement, if applicable.
2. Inform the board of trustees, parents, teachers (if applicable), and any other staff members (if applicable) of the opportunity to participate in a focus group during the site visit.
3. Identify a secure place (e.g., a small conference room, vacant classroom, or lounge) to 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. 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.

4. Provide the CSO with the documents listed in this protocol on page 4 under “Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit.”
5. Arrange for printed copies of lesson plans to be available in all classrooms on the visit date(s).
6. Work with the CSO lead to develop the schedule for the site visit.
7. Prepare for the focus group interviews and copy the team lead on the parent and teacher invitation(s), if applicable, showing that all members of the respective participant groups were invited.
8. Disseminate NYSED online surveys to all teachers, and copy the lead on the invitation to complete the survey.
9. Reach out to your CSO visit lead with any questions or concerns.

Closing Meeting and Site Visit Reports

The renewal site visit ends with a brief closing meeting between the school leadership (which may include members of the board of trustees) and the CSO team. In the closing meeting, the CSO lead will:

1. Identify any additional information or documents needed to complete the assessment of performance;
2. Share any additional, preliminary information that the team feels would benefit the school based on the observations made during the site visit;
3. Review the process for finalizing the renewal site visit report; and
4. Discuss the next steps of the renewal process and potential outcomes.

The site visit report is a summary of findings regarding the school’s performance on each of the ten Performance Framework benchmarks at the time of the site visit, which occurs early in the final year of the current charter. The findings are based on cumulative evidence from relevant documentation as well as observations and information collected on-site. The draft renewal site visit report will be shared with the school so that it may be reviewed for factual accuracy and returned to the CSO within a reasonable timeframe (typically one week). Once the factual corrections, if any, are reviewed, the CSO will send the final report to the school. When possible, site visit reports will be finalized within five weeks of the visit. At this time, the school may, if desired, submit a written response to the findings, which will be attached to the report.

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"> • Effective strategies and problems of practice • 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 • Teacher and administrator evaluation • Professional development • Support for students’ social and emotional health • Supports, accommodations, and modifications for students with diverse learning needs • School safety • Family communication and engagement • Interactions with the board of trustees
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
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

Appendix B: Classroom Observation Worksheet

NYSED Charter School Office

Site Visit Classroom Observation Evidence Worksheet

School Name:			
Observer's Name:		Date:	
Accompanying School Representative (name and role):			
Room #/Teacher(s)	Subject/Grade/Type of Classroom (Gen Ed, SpEd, etc.)	# of Students Observed	Time in Class

Pre-Observation Questions to School Staff Member Accompanying Observer

1. What type of instruction should we expect to see in this classroom?
2. What content or topics are being covered in this class?
3. How many adults will be in the room and what are their roles?

During Observation

Classroom Environment

Metric	Observation <small>2 = observed, 1 = partially observed, 0 = not observed</small>			Notes (If Needed)
A. Classroom organization evident (i.e. lesson plans available, posted agenda or objectives, prepared materials, or other)	2	1	0	
B. Students demonstrate awareness of classroom rules, procedures, and expectations	2	1	0	
C. Classroom appears safe and well-managed	2	1	0	

Classroom environment score: ____ out of 6

Instruction

Metric	Observation <small>2 = observed, 1 = partially observed, 0 = not observed</small>	Notes (If Needed)
D. Instructional model(s) used	(Circle All that Apply) single lead/ lead & assistant/ lead & monitor/ parallel teaching/ team teaching/ station teaching/ alternative teaching/ push-in / other	
E. Groupings used	(Circle All that Apply) whole class / pairs / groups / independent work	
F. Objective(s) communicated clearly	2 1 0	
G. Assessment tools used to check for student understanding	(Circle All that Apply) questions / observations / classwork / rubrics / homework / exit tickets / peer review / polls / individual conferences/ quizzes or tests / other	
H. Lessons differentiated to meet needs of student population	2 1 0	
I. Feedback provided to students	2 1 0	
J. All students are engaged and are participating in learning activities	2 1 0	
K. Class time maximized for learning	2 1 0	

Instruction score: ____ out of 10

Post Observation De-Brief

4. Was the instruction observed aligned with the school's instructional model and key design elements? Was the instruction observed what we would expect to see in this school? Why or why not?
5. What feedback would you give the teacher based on what was just observed? When would you have the opportunity to provide this feedback?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Commentary: