



New York State Education Department

Renewal Site Visit Report 2016-2017

Southside Academy Charter School

Visit Date: 11/1-2/2016
Date of Report: 1/31/2017

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SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

Charter School Summary¹

Name of Charter School	Southside Academy Charter School
Board Chair	Carol Hill
School Leader	Ron Large
District of location	Syracuse City School District
Opening Date	September 2, 2002
Charter Terms	Initial Charter Term: 1/16/2002-1/15/2007 1 st Renewal Term: 1/16/2007-6/30/2007 2 nd Renewal Term: 7/01/2007-6/30/2010 3 rd Renewal Term: 7/01/2010-6/30/2015 4 th Renewal Term: 7/01/2015-6/30/2017
Authorized Grades / Maximum Authorized Enrollment	K-8 690 students
Management Company	National Heritage Academies
Facilities	2200 Onondaga Creek Blvd., Syracuse, NY 13207
Mission Statement	<i>Offering families and students a community public charter school which provides a challenging academic program and focuses on high-achievement and instilling a sense of family, community and leadership within all of our students.</i>
Key Design Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Academic excellence</i> • <i>Moral focus</i> • <i>Parental partnership</i> • <i>Student responsibility</i>
Requested Revisions	None

¹ The information in this section was provided by the NYS Education Department Charter School Office.

School Characteristics

Enrollment

School Year	Grades Served	Maximum Authorized Enrollment	Actual Enrollment
2016-2017	K-8	690	685
2015-2016	K-8	690	687
2014-2015	K-8	690	688
Maximum enrollment: 690			

METHODOLOGY

A two day renewal site visit was conducted at Southside Academy Charter School (SACS) on November 1-2, 2016. The CSO team conducted interviews with the board of trustees, school leadership team, and parents. In cooperation with school leadership, the team also administered an anonymous online survey to teachers at the beginning of the current school year.

The team conducted 20 classroom observations in Grades K-8. The observations were approximately 20 minutes in length and conducted jointly with the school's instructional deans.

The documents and data reviewed by the team before, during, and after the site visit included the following:

- **Teacher roster**
- **Current organization chart**
- **A master school schedule**
- **Board materials**
- **Board self-evaluation documents**
- **Blank teacher and administrator evaluation forms**
- **Student/family handbook**
- **Staff handbook and personnel policies**
- **A list of curricular documents**
- **A list of major assessments**
- **Enrollment data including subgroups**
- **Professional development plans and schedules**
- **Academic data**
- **NYSED-administered teacher survey**

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The Performance Framework, which is part of the oversight plan included in the Charter Agreement for each school that was chartered or renewed in 2012 or beyond, outlines 10 Performance Benchmarks in three key areas of charter school performance:

- Educational Success
- Organizational Soundness
- Faithfulness to Charter and Law

Observational findings from the site visit will be presented in alignment with the [Performance Framework](#) Benchmarks and Indicators according to the rating scale below, although not all indicators will necessarily be assessed on every site visit. A brief summary of the school's overall performance will precede the benchmark analysis. Each benchmark will be rated; however, the report narrative will highlight those indicators not fully met by the school.

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.

For the site visit conducted from November 1-2, 2016 at SACS, see the following Performance Benchmark Scores and discussion.

**New York State Education Department
Charter School Performance Framework Rating**

Performance Benchmark		Level
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).	Approaches
	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 NYS 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.	Meets
	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.	Meets
Organizational Soundness	Benchmark 4: Financial Condition: The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.	Approaches
	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.	Meets
	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.	Approaches
	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.	Meets
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.	Meets
	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.	Approaches
	Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance: The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.	Meets

Performance Benchmark	Level
Summary of Findings	

The school has demonstrated relatively low academic performance in the past but, under a CSO Corrective Action Plan, SACS is showing improvement and strong growth in their academic outcome measures. With a new principal, enhanced leadership team, additional staff and instructional enhancements, the school appears to have improved student and adult culture and put in place programs and systems with the potential for further growth. The school leadership team described comprehensive curricula, the implementation of targeted intervention structures, and a blended learning model to provide more individualized instruction for all students. With the addition of a fourth instructional dean (dean - intervention), the school appears to have ample instructional leadership and has increased expectations for quality teaching. The school has also enhanced its programs for at-risk students, and substantially increased its capacity for academic interventions and special education. The reconfigured school leadership team also described raised expectations for school culture and discipline, which has resulted in far fewer suspensions this year.

The school’s board works closely with the charter management organization, National Heritage Academies (NHA), to implement school improvement efforts and has modified its staffing and instructional model to meet school needs. Specifically, it has increased staffing capacity for special education and interventions. The school has a small board with narrow skills and backgrounds, but is seeking to expand and add expertise. While the board regularly receives reports and data, its oversight of school leadership and NHA is not yet driven by clear goals and timelines.

The school serves a largely low-income student population. While its percentages of other at-risk student subgroups are smaller than the district, it has made good faith efforts towards recruitment and numbers of students with disabilities and English language learners are increasing.

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).

Finding: Approaches

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 1: See Appendix A for further information.

Over the two-year charter term, SACS administered the NYS English language arts and mathematics assessments to students in Grades 3-8. The outcomes from these assessments serve as the basis for determination of academic success in absolute proficiency outcomes and comparisons to the state and district of location for all students and subgroups.

1.a. ESEA designation.

SACS was designated as a *Focus Charter School* for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. In February 2016, SACS was *identified* as a Priority School.

1.b. Similar Schools Comparison

According to the school, analysis of SACS performance in ELA and math compared to similar schools throughout the state shows underperformance of -12.5% points in ELA and -9.4% in math. At present, the gap is narrowing in math, but not in ELA.

2.a. (i-ii) Growth

According to the school, SACS is demonstrating high growth exceeding the state average in 2015, in most grades and subjects. The school reports that its ED and ELL students demonstrated strong increases in proficiency, with a lesser level of attainment by SWDs.

2.b. (i-iii) Proficiency 3-8 Assessments

SACS outperformed SCSD in both ELA and mathematics in 2015 and 2016, showing increases in the variance in aggregate proficiency between SACS and SCSD over time. The school improved in 2016 to outperform the SCSD average in ELA by 7 percentage points and the SCSD average in mathematics by 11 percentage points. Subgroup outcomes for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and students who are economically disadvantaged (ED) show a similar trend of performing increasingly above the district average in 2015 and 2016 in both ELA and mathematics.

Small percentages of students with disabilities (8% proficient in ELA, 8% proficient in math) and English language learners (0% proficient in ELA, 20% proficient in math) performed at a proficient level in 2016, which exceeded the district in most areas.

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.

Finding: Meets

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The school has a documented curriculum that is aligned to the CCLS.b. Teachers use unit and lesson plans that introduce complex materials, stimulate higher order thinking, and build deep conceptual understanding and knowledge around specific content.c. The curriculum is aligned horizontally across classrooms at the same grade level and vertically between grades.d. The curriculum is differentiated to provide opportunities for all students to master grade-level skills and concepts.
2. Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The school staff has a common understanding of high-quality instruction, and observed instructional practices align to this understanding.b. Instructional delivery fosters engagement with all students.
3. Assessment and Program Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The school uses a balanced system of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments.b. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to inform instruction and improve student outcomes.c. The school uses qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the academic program, and modifies the program accordingly.
4. Supports for Diverse Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The school provides supports to meet the academic needs for all students, including but not limited to: students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students.b. The school has systems to monitor the progress of individual students and facilitate communication between interventionists and classroom teachers regarding the needs of individual students.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 2:

The school uses a curricular program based on the NHA model. The school uses some commercial programs, such as Reading Street, Holt Literature, Big Ideas Math, and Math Expressions. School leadership states that NHA provides scope and sequences for English language arts and mathematics, while teachers have developed scope and sequences for social studies and science that align to NYS Learning Standards (NYSLS). In the NYSED teacher survey, 94% of teachers agree that the school uses a documented curriculum aligned to NYSLS. The school also added a blended learning program last year

and is using the computer-based iReady program. Ample curriculum resources were evident, including a variety of texts, workbooks and technology for blended learning. In the past, the school set aside time for “moral focus” education, which is now embedded in the curriculum. For example, a monthly virtue is used as a topic for writing and journaling.

School leaders (principal and deans) described raised expectations for the quality of instruction over the past two years, which is articulated in a classroom framework with domains that include planning, learning environment and delivery of instruction. This year, school leaders have prioritized higher order thinking skills (HOTS), “I can” statements, classroom management, and think-pair-share strategies. Teachers submit lesson plans regularly, which are reviewed by the deans for rigor, engagement and clear objectives. Observed lessons were purposeful and organized and teachers demonstrated generally strong classroom management skills. Most students were observed to be on task and engaged in learning and teachers had instilled clear routines in classrooms that facilitated discussion and transitions. In some of the observed classrooms, teachers did not maintain effective pacing and allowed students to drift off task and lose focus. Differentiated instruction was evident in many observed classrooms through blended learning, stations and co-teaching.

The school uses a number of assessments for a variety of purposes. These include NHA common interim assessments designed to prepare students for state tests, NWEA MAP assessments and AimsWeb. With some adjustments having been made to the common interim assessments, school leaders reported that their assessments are generally well aligned to state tests. Teachers conference with students and set performance goals using a goal sheet for the NWEA and interim assessments. The school has also used ReadyNY resources to prepare students for the state test and develop their test taking stamina. Finally, teachers use a variety of formative assessments, including questioning and exit tickets.

Ninety-four percent of teacher respondents to the NYSED survey agreed that SACS uses assessment data to make school-wide decisions. According to the leadership team and the NYSED-administered teacher survey, the school is driven by achievement, enrollment and engagement goals, and results are shared with the school community. In the teacher survey, 87% of teachers strongly agree or agree that the administration regularly communicates with families and the community on issues related to academics.

The school has made a number of changes over the last two years to support diverse learners. There are school based intervention teams for academics and behavior that identify students and conduct an RTI process that includes progress monitoring. This year, with teacher and parent input, grades 3-8 have been ability grouped into Novice, Basic and Proficient classes. The leadership team identified gaps last summer and enhanced the school’s intervention program to nearly double participation. Based on assessment results, approximately 250 Tier 2 students are now receiving 30 minutes per day of intervention and another 100 Tier 3 students receive 60 minutes per day. Interventions include computer based instruction with iReady or one-to-one or small group instruction with interventionists or the academic specialist. The school has implemented the AimsWeb and iReady programs and is planning to introduce the Reading Mastery program in grades K-2 this year as an additional intervention resource.

The school has also enhanced its special education program to ensure student needs are being met. It has added a dean of Intervention who is responsible for the special education program, increased the number of special education teachers over the last two years from two to six, and brought speech and counseling services in-house. The school provides direct and indirect consultant and resource services with a goal of adding a co-teaching model. The number of English language learners has been increasing,

but at the time of the evaluation visit the school was recruiting for a vacant ENL teacher position to provide push-in services. In the meantime, the school relies on classroom teachers to support ELL students, including through vocabulary development, word walls and anchor charts.

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.

Finding: Meets

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Behavior Management and Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school has a clear approach to behavioral management, including a written discipline policy. b. The school appears safe and all school constituents are able to articulate how the school community maintains a safe environment. c. The school has systems in place to ensure that the environment is free from harassment and discrimination. d. Classroom environments are conducive to learning and generally free from disruption.
2. <i>Family Engagement and Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Teachers communicate with parents to discuss students’ strengths and needs. b. The school assesses family and student satisfaction using strategies such as surveys, feedback sessions, community forums, or participation logs, and considers results when making schoolwide decisions. c. The school has a systematic process for responding to parent or community concerns. d. The school shares school-level academic data with the broader school community to promote transparency and accountability among parents, students and school constituents.
3. <i>Social-Emotional Supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. School leaders collect and use data to track the socio-emotional needs of students. b. School leaders collect and use data regarding the impact of programs designed to support students’ social and emotional health.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 3:

According to interviews with school leadership and information gathered in the NYSED-administered teacher survey, as well as site visit observation, the school has established an environment that is conducive to learning. On the days of the evaluation visit the school was safe, orderly and students well-behaved in classrooms and public spaces. Teachers demonstrated generally strong classroom management skills and interactions between students and adults were respectful. The five parents who attended the parent focus group reported a decline in disruptive behavior and more effective classroom management than in prior years.

The principal described his focus on improving school culture with emphasis on positive expectations. Posters throughout the building remind staff that they should strive for a ratio of 4:1 regarding positive to negative comments to students. Recognition rallies focus on effort on the first interim assessment; subsequent rallies will recognize growth. Classroom rules and behavior charts were posted in classrooms as well as some evidence of instructional engagement strategies such as SLANT. School leaders noted a large reduction in suspensions, down to 19 this year compared to 67 in September and October last year.

While the school eliminated scheduled time for moral focus education, as part of a shift in the NHA model it has embedded character education into the curriculum. For example, the virtue of gratitude is highlighted in text and discussions during the month of November. The school has a school-based intervention team that focuses on behavior issues and considers referrals and discipline data to identify students in need of social emotional support. The school has recently implemented a grant funded K-3 play therapy program.

Parent communication is facilitated by flyers, announcements, phone messages, teacher calls and an online system that provides access to grades. Interviewed parents said that they always feel aware how their child is doing. The school provides a number of opportunities for parent involvement. For example, the principal hosts monthly coffees with parents and the school hosts parent events as part of its Title I program with a focus on academic support for children. However, interviewed parents said they would like more interaction with the school and noted that they can no longer drop off students directly to their classrooms and use that opportunity to talk to their child's teachers. Parents felt the school was always responsive when they requested information and that it is now trying to improve at proactive communication.

Benchmark 4: Financial Condition

The school is in sound and stable financial condition as evidenced by performance on key financial indicators.

Finding: Approaches

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 4:

SACS appears to be in weak financial condition as evidenced by performance on key indicators derived from the school's independently audited financial statements.

The Charter School Office reviews the financial performance and management of charter schools using quantitative and qualitative methods. Near-term indicators, such as the current ratio and unrestricted days cash, are measures of liquidity and of the charter school's capacity to maintain operations. Long-term indicators, such as total margin and debt-to asset ratio, are measures of the charter school's capacity to remain viable and to meet financial obligations.

Overall Financial Outlook

A *composite score* is an overall measure of financial health calculated by the Department's Office of Audit Services. This score is based on a weighting of primary reserves, equity, and net income. A charter

school with a score between 1.5 and 3.0 is considered to be in strong financial health. SACSs composite score for 2014-2015 is 0.60. The table below shows the school’s most recently available composite scores from 2012-2013 through 2014-2015.

**Southside Academy Charter School’s Composite Scores
2012-2013 to 2014-2015**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Composite Score</i>
2014-2015	0.60
2013-2014	0.80
2012-2013	0.70

Source: NYSED Office of Audit Services

Near-Term Indicators

Near-term indicators of financial health are used to understand the current financial performance and viability of the school. The Charter School Office uses three measures:

The *current ratio* is a financial ratio that measures whether or not a charter school has enough resources to pay its debts over the next 12 months. The ratio is mainly used to give an idea of the school's ability to pay back its short-term liabilities (debt and payables) with its short-term assets (cash, inventory, receivables). The higher the current ratio, the more capable the school is of paying its obligations, with a ratio under 1.0 indicating concern. For 2015-2016, SACS had a current ratio of 1.0.

Unrestricted cash measures, in days, whether the charter school can meet operating expenses without receiving new income. Charter schools typically strive to maintain at least 90 days of cash on hand. For fiscal year 2015-2016, SACS operated with 3 days of unrestricted cash.

Enrollment stability measures whether or not a charter school is meeting its enrollment projections, thereby generating sufficient revenue to fund ongoing operations. Actual enrollment that is over 85 percent is considered reasonable. SACS’s enrollment stability for 2015-2016 was at 99.6 percent.

Long-Term Indicators

A charter school’s *debt to asset ratio* measures the extent to which the school relies on borrowed funds to finance its operations. It is calculated as total liabilities divided by total assets. A ratio of 0.9 or less meets a standard of low risk. For 2015-2016, SACS’s debt to asset ratio was 1.0.

Total margin measures the deficit or surplus a charter school yields out of its total revenues; in other words, whether or not the school is living within its available resources. Total margin is calculated as net income divided by total revenue. A total margin that is positive indicates low risk. For 2015-2016, SACS’s total margin was 0.0 percent.

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.

Finding: Meets

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 5:

The Charter School Office reviewed SACS's 2015-16 audited financial statements to determine whether the independent auditor observed sufficient internal controls over financial reporting. The auditor did not identify any deficiencies in internal controls that could be considered material weaknesses.

The NYSED CSO will continue to monitor the relationship between the school and NHA.

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.

Finding: Approaches

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Board Oversight and Governance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The board recruits and selects board members with skills and expertise that meet the needs of the school.b. The board engages in strategic and continuous improvement planning by setting priorities and goals that are aligned with the school's mission and educational philosophy.c. The board demonstrates active oversight of the charter school management, fiscal operations and progress toward meeting academic and other school goals.d. The board regularly updates school policies.e. The board utilizes a performance-based evaluation process for evaluating school leadership, itself and providers.f. The board demonstrates full awareness of its legal obligations to the school and stakeholders.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 6:

The school is governed by a small board with five members with a narrow set of skills and backgrounds, including some business, finance and higher education. Interviewed board members indicated that they are hoping to expand the board and add more finance, legal and k-12 education expertise. The board does have legal counsel who attends board meetings and assists with policy development. NHA does provide a board portal with resources and an annual symposium, and NHA representatives said they are identifying learning opportunities for the board and seeking to bring in experts to educate the board about its roles and responsibilities.

The board receives monthly reports and data dashboards and is monitoring the school’s performance. While board members said they are satisfied with the school’s recent growth, they acknowledged the need to do more. However, they did not identify clear goals and timelines for measuring progress and holding school leadership and NHA accountable.

The board described enhanced monitoring and oversight on the part of NHA, including increased contact. This has led to changes in leadership and staff for the purpose of enhancing the school program and raising achievement levels. The board is also in the process of renegotiating the term of the lease of the building with NHA.

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.

Finding: Meets

<i>Element</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
1. <i>School Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school has an effective school leadership team that obtains staff commitment to a clearly defined mission and set of goals, allowing for continual improvement in student learning. b. Roles and responsibilities for leaders, staff, management, and board members are clearly defined. Members of the school community adhere to defined roles and responsibilities. c. The school has clear and well-established communication systems and decision-making processes in place which ensure effective communication across the school. d. The school successfully recruits, hires, and retains key personnel, and makes decisions – when warranted – to remove ineffective staff members.
2. <i>Professional Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The school is fully staffed with high quality personnel to meet all educational and operational needs, including finance, human resources, and communication. b. The school has established structures for frequent collaboration among teachers. c. The school ensures that staff has requisite skills, expertise, and professional development necessary to meet students’ needs. d. The school has systems to monitor and maintain organizational and instructional quality—which includes a formal process for teacher evaluation geared toward improving instructional practice. e. The school has mechanisms to solicit teacher feedback and gauge teacher satisfaction.
3. <i>Contractual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The board of trustees and school leadership establish effective working

Element

Indicators

Relationships
 N/A

relationships with the management company or comprehensive service provider.
b. Changes in the school’s charter management or comprehensive service provider contract comply with required charter amendment procedures.
c. The school monitors the efficacy of contracted service providers or partners.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 7:

The current principal is in his second year at SACS with a mandate to turn the school around. Improvement efforts have focused on enhancing both student and adult culture. The school has set clear and measurable goals that are shared with the school community. They set a trajectory to meet state averages in two years. A school improvement committee meets biweekly with the principal to monitor goals and discuss strategies to achieve them.

NHA has increased its presence in the school over the past two years. A director of school quality (DSQ) visits monthly and conducts a weekly one-on-one meeting with the principal. School leaders reported that NHA provides ample curriculum support, common assessments, and professional development, including a summer leadership summit.

The school’s organizational structure and staffing plan are evolving to address low student performance. For example, in addition to three deans for grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8, the position of dean of intervention was added, which is supplemental to NHA’s traditional organizational model. The school has ample instructional leadership, including a principal, four deans and an instructional coach, all of whom collaborate closely. They provide lesson plan review and feedback, regular observation of instruction, and weekly one-on-one (O3) meetings with faculty. Deans join weekly grade team meetings as well. The school employs the NHA Classroom Framework to define professional expectations and inform formal and informal observations and evaluation.

The school has been challenged by teacher turnover, with 42% teacher turnover rate reported from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2015-2016 school year. School leaders report improved teacher retention in the current year, but still many teachers are new to the building. According to the 2016 NYSED teacher survey, 66% of teachers at SACS have less than 3 years teaching experience. The principal and the board state that staff compensation is set at 115% above market value in an effort to attract and retain teachers at SACS. The school has increased its student support staff; however, at the time of the evaluation visit the school was struggling to recruit suitable applicants for a vacant ESL position.

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.

Finding: Meets

Element

Indicators

1. *Mission and Key Design*

a. School stakeholders share a common and consistent understanding of the school’s mission and key design elements outlined in the charter.

Element

Indicators

Elements

b. The school has fully implemented the key design elements in the approved charter and in any subsequently approved revisions.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 8:

The school’s mission and creed are posted throughout the building and stakeholders including school leadership, teachers (in the NYSED survey) and parents consistently described a clear focus on school improvement as defined by academic achievement. While they acknowledged that the school is not yet achieving its mission, clear goals were in place and progress was being made.

The school is organized around the NHA model and implements many of its programs and resources, such as curriculum and assessments. However, changes have been made to the model to improve school performance, such as additional leadership and staffing to meet the needs of special populations. Similarly, while moral focus is part of the NHA model, school leaders described discretion in how they realize this in their building.

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.

Finding: Approaches

Element

Indicators

1. *Targets are met*

a. The school maintains sufficient enrollment demand for the school to meet or come close to meeting the enrollment plan outlined in the charter.

2. *Targets are not met*

a. The school is making regular and significant annual progress toward meeting the targets.

b. The school has implemented extensive recruitment strategies and program services to attract and retain students with disabilities, English language learners, and students who are eligible for free and reduced priced lunch. Strategies include, but are not limited to: outreach to parents and families in the surrounding communities, widely publicizing the lottery for such school, efforts to academically support these students, and enrollment policy revisions, such as employing a weighted lottery or enrollment preference, to increase the proportion of enrolled students from the three priority populations.

c. The school has implemented a systematic process for evaluating recruitment and outreach strategies and program services for each of the three categories of students, and makes strategic improvements as needed.

Table 1: Student Demographics – Southside Academy Charter School Compared to Syracuse City School District

	2014-15			2015-16			2016-17
	Percent of Enrollment		Variance ²	Percent of Enrollment		Variance	Percent of Enrollment
	School	District		School	District		School ³
Enrollment of Special Populations							
Economically Disadvantaged	87%	77%	+10	93%	79%	+14	91%
English Language Learners	0%	15%	-15	1%	16%	-15	3%
Students with Disabilities	9%	20%	-11	8%	20%	-12	14%

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 9:

The school enrolls a large low-income population with reportedly one of the highest percentages of student eligible for free and reduced price lunch in the city. The percentage of students with disabilities and English language learners is relatively low when compared to the district. The school reports the following outreach efforts to increase applications from at-risk students:

- Employment of a student recruitment specialist to build relationships with support organizations;
- Distribution of brochures describing Southside special education and ELL programs, through day care centers, community centers, churches, grocery stores;
- Applications and school information provided in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Italian, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Urdu;
- Info session held at Spanish Action League of Onondaga County (with interpreter support);
- Use of community partnership agencies to support recruitment efforts

School leaders indicated that their special education population is growing and they have hired additional staff to meet their needs. At the time of the visit the school had also identified 44 students to screen for ELL status and was in the process of hiring an ESL teacher to implement a language immersion program.

CSO will continue to monitor whether the efforts are effective at reducing the demographic gap between the charter school and the Syracuse City School District over the next charter term.

² Variance is defined as the percent of subgroup enrollment between the charter school and the district of location.

³ Reported by the school; 2016-2017 enrollment data has not been publicly released as of the date of this report.

Benchmark 10: Legal Compliance

The school complies with applicable laws, regulations, and the provisions of its charter.

Finding: Meets

<u>Element</u>	<u>Indicators</u>
1. <i>Legal Compliance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. The school has compiled a record of substantial compliance with applicable state and federal laws and the provisions of its charter including, but not limited to: those related to student admissions and enrollment; FOIL and Open Meetings Law; protecting the rights of students and employees; financial management and oversight; governance and reporting; and health and safety requirements.b. The school has undertaken appropriate corrective action when needed, and has implemented necessary safeguards to maintain compliance with all legal requirements.c. The school has sought Board of Regents and/or Charter School Office approval for significant revisions.

Summative Evidence for Benchmark 10:

Over the course of the charter term, Southside has demonstrated substantial compliance with applicable laws and regulations and the terms of its charter.

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT AND GRADUATION OUTCOMES

Table 1: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes for All Students: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

All Students	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	8%	8%	0	31%	-23	16%	8%	+8	36%	-20
2014-15	10%	8%	+2	31%	-21	15%	9%	+6	38%	-23
2015-16	18%	11%	+7	38%	-20	21%	10%	+11	39%	-18

Table 2: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup – Economically Disadvantaged Students: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

Economically Disadvantaged	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	6%	5%	+1	20%	-14	13%	6%	+7	26%	-13
2014-15	9%	5%	+4	21%	-12	15%	7%	+8	27%	-12
2015-16	17%	8%	+9	27%	-10	21%	8%	+13	28%	-7

Table 3: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup – Students with Disabilities: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

Students with Disabilities	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	2%	1%	+1	5%	-3	11%	2%	+9	10%	+1
2014-15	0%	1%	-1	6%	-6	11%	2%	+9	11%	0
2015-16	8%	1%	+7	8%	0	8%	2%	+6	11%	-3

Table 4: Elementary/Middle School Assessment Proficiency Outcomes by Subgroup – English Language Learners: School, District & NYS Level Aggregates

English Language Learners	ELA					Math				
	School	District		NYS		School	District		NYS	
		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)		District	Delta = (Sch-Dct)	NYS	Delta = (Sch-NYS)
2013-14	~	1%		3%	-3	0%	2%	-2	12%	-12
2014-15	~	1%		4%	-4	~	2%	-2	13%	-13
2015-16	0%	1%	-1	4%	-4	20%	30%	+10	12%	+8