



New York State Education Department

Charter Renewal Site Visit Protocol 2015-2016

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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 relative to the performance benchmarks contained in the [Charter School Performance Framework](#).

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 State Education Department (SED) Charter School Office (CSO). After the CSO has reviewed the Application for Charter Renewal and determined that 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 relative to the Performance Framework, identify trends that emerge from the evidence, and develop findings that are summarized in the charter renewal site visit report.

The priorities that will be 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 Regulations of the Commissioner. 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 on the terms and conditions of the school's charter renewal period or denies the school's request for charter renewal.

Charter Renewal Site Visit Benchmarks

To evaluate the school's performance within the context of the renewal site visit, the CSO will summarize key findings and include an assessment of whether the charter school exceeds, meets, approaches, or falls far below 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 growth, proficiency and high school graduation.
	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.
	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 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 supply the following documents to the CSO team lead. 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 minutes for a minimum of one year or a time period specified by the CSO lead
- f. **Blank teacher evaluation forms**
- g. **Internal parent, student, and teacher survey results or NYSED online surveys**, as requested by the team lead

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 include focus groups and classroom observations. 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.

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 – 10:30 a.m.	Leadership focus group meetings	Conference room
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.	CSO team meeting (including lunch)	Conference room
1:30 - 3:30 p.m.	Classroom observations	School-wide
4:30 - 6:00 p.m.	CSO team meeting	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
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	CSO team meeting (including lunch)	Conference room
12:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Classroom observations, follow up meetings with individual staff or program areas, school leadership team focus group follow up	Library
2:00 - 5:00 p.m.	CSO team meeting	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 team lead introduces the team members to the school leader and reviews the purpose of the charter renewal site visit. The school leader briefly orients the team to the building(s).
B. Focus group interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school invites all members of a focus group population of the opportunity to participate in the interviews and does not hand-pick individuals 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. CSO team members pose questions, prepared in advance, that reflect the Charter School Performance Framework benchmarks. Each focus group interview is closed to anyone other than team members and the participant group.
C. Surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team lead will request the most recent internal parent, student, and teacher survey results from the school leader. If the school does not have internal survey results to share with the CSO team, the CSO will request that the school administers the electronic NYSED parent, student, and teacher surveys. The CSO will share a link to the NYSED surveys. The school will send the surveys to all stakeholders prior to the full site visit, and will copy the team lead on all communication. A translated survey may be available.
C. Classroom observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CSO team selects a representative sample of classrooms to observe. 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 should 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 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.
- Team members 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

- CSO 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 CSO team convenes for a confidential meeting to discuss the available evidence and the preliminary findings suggested by that evidence.

E. Charter renewal site visit report preparation

- The CSO drafts 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 review and reach consensus on any revisions to the draft report.
- 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 makes 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 charter renewal site visit. These responsibilities are summarized below.

A. Before the Site Visit

- 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 protocol under “Planning and Scheduling the Charter Renewal Site Visit.”
- Prepare for the focus group interviews and copy the team lead on the invitation showing that all teachers and/or parents were invited to a focus group.
- Disseminate NYSED online surveys to all teachers, parents, and students (if applicable), and copy the team lead on the invitation to the take a survey.

B. During the Site Visit

- Meet with the team on the morning of the first day to orient the team members to the school.
- Coordinate the focus group interviews, and participate in the school leadership focus group session(s).
- Be available to the team during the site visit to answer questions or to provide additional documentation.

C. After the Site Visit

- Review the draft report and identify any factual corrections after consultation with other school stakeholders. Send factual corrections to the CSO.

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
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